The BRIGHTON BOYS at St. MIHIEL

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"Americans Seeking Our Own Lines," Tom Spelled Out.

The BRIGHTON BOYS at ST. MIHIEL

BY

LIEUTENANT JAMES R. DRISCOLL

ILLUSTRATED

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PHILADELPHIA

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THE BRIGHTON BOYS SERIES

BY

LIEUTENANT JAMES R. DRISCOLL

AS FOLLOWS:

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
WITH THE FLYING CORPS

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
IN THE TRENCHES

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
WITH THE BATTLE FLEET

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
IN THE RADIO SERVICE

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
WITH THE SUBMARINE FLEET

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
AT CHATEAU-THIERRY

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
AT ST. MIHIEL

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
WITH THE ENGINEERS AT CANTIGNY

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The Brighton Boys at St. Mihiel

CHAPTER I

Big Preparations

RAIN, rain, rain.

Not the puny patter of a slow and drizzling and short-lived storm, nor the gusty petulance of an April shower, but a steady, sullen inundation that had set in more than a week before.

For days and nights it had been nothing but a steady downpour, and from all appearances and barometric indications for days more it would continue to be nothing else.

It was as desolate a place and as gloomy a season as one could imagine, and the abominable weather was but adding to the depression of the thousands of sturdy American youths who for weeks had loitered in what seemed to them a useless and nerve-racking inactivity in a vast water-logged section of France, west of St. Mihiel, almost south of battle-scarred Verdun.

Now and then as the hours wore on toward late afternoon and early darkness, a rising wind seemed to whine something of an echo to the mental misery of those in the khaki-clad armies thus held as on a leash. Or was it more as a dismal-toned challenge to them as they wallowed through the slippery mud, unloading and distributing food, supplies, ammunition from the seemingly never-ending caravan of drab-colored motor trucks which hour after hour and day after day like the rain itself streamed in seemingly from nowhere to the veritable swamp in which the cream of American young manhood waded —and waited.

Tom Walton, despite himself, was thinking of Brighton and the pleasant school-days there, as, just relieved from a monotonous sentry duty, he headed toward the company kitchen where he knew his good friend Harper would hand him out a cup of steaming coffee to warm his blood and loosen his stiffened bones.

Often with Harper, and with Ollie Ogden, too, Tom Walton had played football on a sometimes soggy field at Brighton, but never, he was repeating to himself bitterly, had it been anything like this.

But pessimism or drooping spirits cannot for long grip a lad in perfect health and possessed of the knowledge that eventually, soon or late, and probably at no far distant date, he has a great mission to perform. And so, with the first thoughts of good old Brighton, the mood of Tom Walton began to change, even the weather did not seem quite so dreary, the outlook not so glum.

Like many of their pals from the famous school, these three had gone into the same service together—fighting doughboys, if you please—and at their own request had been directly associated in the same unit from the first hour that they went into training. And it had at all times been a happy trio, for in their days at school they had been inseparable pals.

Just at present Harper, by grace of his culinary capabilities, was doing emergency duty in the kitchen because of the temporary illness of one of the regular cooks, but this was more of an advantage than a hardship to his two friends, as a fat sandwich or a couple of hot doughnuts between meals often bore substantial testimony.

Tom Walton was thinking of these things when suddenly he was brought back to the

realities of life by a loudly shouted "Hi, there!" accompanied by a clatter which sounded like a section of the German army advancing at a tremendous pace.

It was all so sudden, the ground so treacherously slippery, that Tom scarcely had attempted to turn when something of tremendous weight and momentum struck him a glancing blow and he went sprawling face downward in the muck, his mackinaw canopying out over him like a miniature dog-tent.

Before he could rise and scrape enough of the mud from his eyes to see what was going on, three or four men went galloping by him, one shouting warnings and futile commands, another grunting under the stress of his labors, a third laughing jerkily but uproariously.

In shocked surprise and disgusted recognition, Tom, rising monkey-like to all-fours, took in the situation in a single sour glance.

He had been bowled over by Maud, the company mule!

Maud, evidently, was on another privately-conducted tour of the works—a favorite diversion, by the way—and Maud was objecting strenuously to any curtailment of her pastime, especially in the shape of human

company. It was the fourth time in three days that Maud had broken tether, and, so to speak, pulled stakes for another part of Europe—and always somebody got hurt.

Tom reflected with some satisfaction that at least he had come off better than "Buck" Granger, who in a pursuit of the escaped Maud the preceding day had attempted a flying flank attack just as Maud perceptibly increased her speed and let fly with her heels. Buck's pained expression later, when the surgeon had finished plastering and bandaging him up, was: "The ornery cuss caved two of my slats."

"That mule will get killed some day," Tom muttered to himself, still scraping mud from face and garments. "Fellow won't stand for this sort of stuff all the time. I believe she's a German spy anyway, trying to kill off decent Americans the way she does."

And he wended his way sorely toward Harper and the kitchen, while afar off he could hear the continued cry of the hunt as Maud, the incorrigible, cavorted around in the mud, defying sentries, dodging pursuers, having generally what Maud seemed to regard as an all-round good time.

"Any news?" he asked, as Harper handed

him the cup of hot coffee for which he had come.

Harper looked off to the northward for a moment before he answered. Not that he could see anything but hundreds upon hundreds of men of all branches of the American arms, but he seemed to be conjuring a dismal picture in his imagination as he stood there in silence, seeming not to have heard the question.

"Well, are you in a trance?" Tom demanded impatiently.

"No," Harper answered in a peculiar tone, "but I'm wondering just how much longer we're going to be kept here this way. Of course, we shouldn't complain or question, but I guess we all feel the same way about it. We're all anxious to 'go in,' and I don't think it ought to be much longer now."

"What do you mean? What have you heard?" Tom asked, excitedly.

"It's not what I have heard, for that hasn't been very much. It's what I have seen, what you have seen, what every man here has seen that makes me feel that the big clash of the war is soon to come, and that we will have a chance to be in it. The concentration of the entire First American Army

in this sector isn't for the purpose of giving us a vacation, and after all I guess we can best show our patriotism and loyalty right now by being ready for any emergency, rather than grumbling because Foch and Pershing haven't asked us out to lunch to get our opinion on their plans."

"Righto!" exclaimed Tom, with just that emphasis upon the word which the English Tommies had taught the Yanks.

"Yes," continued Harper, "I'm satisfied that we are down for a big part on the program. Look what our men have been doing further north since June 11th, when they captured Belleau Wood and took three hundred prisoners.

"And just review all of that and last month. On June 19th our men crossed the Marne, near Château-Thierry. On June 29th it was a raid on Montdidier. July 2nd they captured Vaux. On the glorious 4th word came of American success in the Vosges. A month later Fismes was taken, and now—look at this."

Harper liked nothing better than to spring a surprise—a happy surprise—on his friends. He pulled from under his blouse a late copy of "Stars and Stripes," the official newspaper

of the American Expeditionary forces. It was dated September 3rd, and across the first page, under bold, inspiring headlines, was the stirring story of the capture of the plain of Juvigny, north of Soissons.

With nothing of boastfulness about it, it told in vigorous language of the heroic valor of the American troops; how, behind a creep-barrage, they had steadily advanced until, with a final lifting of the artillery screen, the men, singing, shouting, cheering, advanced into open battle with the Hun hosts.

It was a story to stir the blood of any patriotic American, particularly one who was himself under arms and only awaiting the opportunity to perform like service in behalf of his country and humanity.

Tom Walton read it to the last word before he spoke.

"I think you're right," he said, "it won't be long now until we, also, will be 'going in'."

"What else could all this mean?" was Harper's way of reply. His arm swept the whole horizon, north, westward, south, and then up toward the east. "Haven't you noticed the immense numbers of the Engineering Corps that are being brought up? Thousands upon thousands of them."

"And the truck trains," Tom supplemented. "Buck" Granger told me last night that he heard a captain and a lieutenant talking, and how many of those trucks do you think they said already are here?"

"Don't know. Couldn't even guess. How many?"

"More than three thousand, and they're still coming in by scores every hour."

"It means business," Harper assented, nodding his head vigorously. "It means business, and on a tremendous scale. Why, just this morning—"

But just at that moment their conversation was interrupted. Their school chum and army pal, Ollie Ogden, burst in upon them, wrathful to the point of pitched battle, and at the time too breathless to speak.

"Have you seen—," he demanded, and then gasped for another breath. "Have you seen—."

"Yes," ventured Tom, in friendly mockery, winking at Harper, "We've seen a lot. But just what do you refer to?"

"MAUD!" almost shrieked the angered Ollie. "Have you seen that gol darned mule?"

George Harper and Tom Walton went into

gales of uncontrollable laughter. Had they seen Maud? They sure had. Harper saw her on her way—whither it led she refused to say—and Tom had encountered her on the journey.

"Well, what are you two standing there guffawing about?" Ollie demanded, his rage in no way abated by the evident amusement of his friends. "You hee-haw like that beast itself."

This was too much for Harper, and with his arms folded across his stomach he doubled up like a jack knife in his mirth. But his position was rather unfortunate. He had his back to, and was directly in front of, the outraged Ollie, who hauled off and gave Harper his boot with a force that straightway brought him upright.

"Look here," he ejaculated in pained surprise.

"Look here!" repeated Ollie. "I've looked here, I've looked there, I've looked all over this blamed camp for that ornery offspring of Satan. I guess you fellows would like to see me get a couple of days in the guard for letting her get away."

"Could anybody ever keep her when she made up her mind to go?" Tom asked, now laughing as well at Harper as at Ogden.

"Well, I couldn't, anyway, and it's not my fault," Ollie asserted. "Just because a fellow's doing stable police he can't be personal valet to a beast like that all day. She—he—say, what is a mule, anyway? A he or a she?"

"A mule is what America was before Germany tested her too far," Harper advised him.

"What do you mean?" asked Ollie, with a blank look.

"Neutral."

"Oh, no. You've got Maud wrong. She's never neutral. She's belligerent all the time."

Just then there was a wild whoop of mixed masculine voices, punctuated with a loud hee-haw, and Ollie dashed off to join a growing group of khaki-clad runners in pursuit of the elusive Maud.

But the mule's present freedom was destined for an early and ignominious end. She hadn't counted upon the slipperiness of the soggy mud. She was fanning the air with her two hind legs when the two in front went from under. She came down suddenly upon her side, and with a heavy grunt.

In that instant two of the leaders of the chase were upon her. The struggle that

ensued was spectacular in the extreme. The next two men to arrive grabbed the two fore feet.

"A rope, a rope!" they cried in unison, but none dared go near, or even approach, Maud's rapid-fire hind legs which were kicking out frantically in every direction.

But the men hung on—two at her fore legs and half a dozen across the body—and in a few minutes more another breathless doughboy arrived with the needed rope.

The struggle continued, but finally Maud's capture was made complete. A slip-noose was made upon her neck; half a dozen huskies took death grips upon the other end; the signal was given, and all at once those who were grappling with her jumped to a safe distance.

Maud gave one disgusted glance around, and then with a mighty effort rose to her four feet and her full dignity. The six men gave a quick tug at the rope around her neck.

Wow! The response was immediate and expressive. Maud's heels cut the air and she made a bee-line for her captors. They wildly scrambled to escape the onslaught, but bravely held to the rope. The mule went

crashing by, and the slack line began to be taken up. With a sudden jerk it became taut, and the six men, feet outspread before them, but unable to take a grip upon the slippery mud, began a wild and involuntary ride in the rear of the cavorting Maud.

Across camp they took their undignified way, as hundreds of onlookers shouted in laughter, or made pretentious but ineffective efforts by the vigorous waving of arms and hats to stop the mule and the mud-bespattered retinue that went flying in her wake. But even Maud could not for long endure the strangulation that the dead weight of six men placed upon her windpipe, and so, after having traversed fully half a mile, she came to a halt that was as abrupt as had been the original beginning of her flight.

A strategist at all times, Maud knew by long experience how to accept defeat and capture. It was with a lamb-like docility that unfailingly won her immunity from the punishment which she so richly deserved.

But even Maud's caprice, painful as it had been to a few, with the amusement it had provided all the others, was forgotten a few moments later in a rumor that ran the gamut of the square miles of armed camp with greater

speed than the fastest mule ever could hope to attain.

"Buck" Granger, who was just wandering from a remote spot where he had dropped off in the pursuit, first brought the news to Tom Walton, Ollie Ogden and Harper.

"Listen!" he said, gathering them about him as though it was some secret not yet told to another soul. "Pershing is due to arrive here tomorrow morning."

Pershing coming! The supreme commander of all the American forces in Europe! "Black Jack" Pershing, adored alike by the men under him and those at home! Coming into the American sector at that point! It could mean but one thing. Their time to show their mettle was near at hand.

The rumor ran back and forth through the vast area that the advance might be made within the next twenty-four hours. None could confirm it, of course. None wanted to deny it. All were on the tip-toe of expectancy.

No longer were there lingering doubts. It was perfectly clear and assured now that for a vast project, indeed, had all of these great preparations been made.

CHAPTER II

Ready to Go

ALTHOUGH there was scarcely an officer who long ago had not realized the full import and significance of the gigantic movement which had concentrated so many hundred thousand Americans in and around that section opposite the German-held St. Mihiel salient, comparatively few of the lads in the line had looked quite so deeply into the situation.

Now it was perfectly clear.

Hundreds of the biggest guns, together with the famous French "75's" had been concentrated in position a few miles back. Aeroplane squadrons had been constantly patrolling the skies. Every branch of the Engineers had been brought up, and now those brave and intrepid men, the Pioneers, were adding the final touches to the preparations for their hazardous, self-sacrificing task.

For the Pioneers, if you did not know it before, go first of all when it is a concentrated

attack upon a well fortified and entrenched position.

It is the Pioneers who pave the way, doing what previous artillery bombardment may have failed to do in cutting wire entanglements, etc.; theirs is the necessary preliminary work, in which, much of the time, they are open targets for the enemy fire.

And then come the engineers, bridging streams, cutting and blasting away earthen and concrete obstructions, filling in shell holes, levelling roads—making ready for the great attack in which every branch of the service on land will participate; infantry, cavalry, light artillery, tanks, trucks, ambulances, field hospitals, everything.

These were the things for which everyone was making ready at ten o'clock the following morning when the first actual order was received. It was an order which in no way affected the men and lesser officers directly, and yet it was one which marked the first step in the tremendous program.

Brigade, regimental and even battalion commanders, which is to say brigadier-generals, colonels, lieutenant-colonels and majors, were summoned to Division Headquarters.

There, as it soon became known, they met

not only the major-general in command, but General Pershing himself. Unheralded, he had arrived by fast auto with the break of dawn, and since that time, as hundreds of maps spread out before them testified, he and the major-general had been in most important conference.

To Corporal Tom Walton fell the never-to-be-forgotten privilege of witnessing this historic sight.

His colonel's aide arrived back from the conference a few moments after it had begun, to get some maps from the colonel's quarters. He needed someone to help carry them over.

"Corporal Walton," his direct commander's voice called, "you will accompany and assist Lieutenant Behring."

And that was how Tom Walton got his first glimpse of the great American commander, General Pershing. It was a close view, too, for he had to deposit the maps and photographs upon a table only a few feet away from where the generals sat.

In that instant, while Tom was furtively staring at him, General Pershing looked up. It may have been that he did not give a thought to the youth who thus was overcome by a sudden confusion, but Tom believed

otherwise, for the eyes seemed to twinkle kindly for just the fraction of a second, the square jaws relaxed just a little, and the line of the mouth relaxed.

Perhaps, on the other hand, with the biggest job of his big career before him, General Pershing was not unmindful of the fact that he had behind him a whole army—thousands upon thousands—of just such clean-cut, courageous, never-say-die Americans as this young man from Brighton.

In a second, however, he was concentrated again upon the problems before him, and Tom, his job completed, was on his way back to his comrades, to tell them over and over again just how General Pershing looked, spoke, acted, and a dozen other details of information which Tom did his best to give.

What actually was going on at that conference was American and world history in the making. It was, as it became known later, the beginning of the end for the Boche and for Germany.

Thousands of maps and photographs were distributed. Every foot of ground to be traversed by every separate unit was marked off, timed and scheduled to the whole program. Each colonel knew to the exact mo-

ment the time when his regiment was to go forward from a given point of concentration; every major knew how his battalion was to be divided and thrust eastward under instructions which he was to convey to his respective captains.

No war strategy ever was worked out to finer detail. None ever attained its objective so quickly and successfully.

That afternoon, as the captains were summoned to receive their detailed orders, the greatest excitement prevailed everywhere. Orders are not revealed to the men and non-commissioned officers until the time has arrived to carry them into effect. But there was no longer any concealing the fact that activities of tremendous import were imminent, and all down the lines, as men examined their accoutrements, the word passed and was repeated, "We're going in."

And finally some bright mind hit upon a recollection, and thenceforth there was no further doubt as to the day of the advance; only the hour was in doubt.

On September 12, 1914, the Germans, at tremendous sacrifice in their first drive toward Paris, had established the St. Mihiel salient. It had been held steadily ever since,

and on this September 10, 1918, it was within two days of that fourth anniversary. It would be fitting punishment that the Huns should begin to suffer retribution on the very day when they might be expected to be feeling as boastful as only a German can.

Yes, there was no doubt about it in any man's mind. They were going to attack on September 12th.

And so, with this almost definite assurance in mind, the preparations went forward with even renewed vigor and anticipation. No need to urge the men. They worked as boys would for a holiday. The rain, which continued with only slight and infrequent abatement, was no annoyance, was hardly even noticed now.

The big work for which they had prepared for months—first in America, then in England, and finally behind the lines in France—was now at hand. Their mettle was to be tested against the Boche. Their numbers, their ability, their courage were to be thrown into the world contest of Liberty against Autocracy.

"Do you remember how you used to feel just before we went into a game against an eleven that we knew to be at least our own

weight?" Ollie breathed to Tom and George, as the three of them were completing the last essentials to a critical inspection.

"Sure do," replied Tom, the biggest and heaviest of the three, "and I never put on a head-piece with greater anticipation than I do this," and he clamped his heavy helmet on as though the battle already were under way.

In a muffled voice Harper wanted to know how his gas mask became him, and if really, after all, he wasn't the long-sought missing link.

There is a cheerfulness about men about to go into battle that only those who have been through it can understand—a thrilling of every nerve that makes one jest, even though death may be stalking only a few yards or a few hours ahead—a forgetfulness of all else but the determined will to fight to the last, and to win.

Suddenly from far to the east there came the muffled thunder of heavy cannonading which brought all three men upright. For a moment they thought that real hostilities were on; but the illusion was not for long. The sporadic reply of their own batteries told them as clearly as words could that it was

just "one of those messages from Fritz and Heinie" which of course required a reply, but did not after all amount to very much. It was a sort of exchange of compliments, the lads in the trenches termed it.

Nevertheless every man was on edge, and when a simultaneous shout of warning and expectancy went up from two or three alert fellows who had been gazing skyward, a thousand heads went up, to witness one of those most daring and spectacular exhibitions of the entire war—a battle in the air.

The three Brighton boys—for as such they were known to all their companions—rushed for an elevation already occupied by half a dozen others, and from which a wider sweep of the skyline was to be had.

Even as they did so the real preliminaries to the battle began. The American pilot, who it was now plain had been merely playing the role of the pursued to lead the enemy beyond the aid of any of his own machines, suddenly swerved for the attack.

The Boche pilot was in a small and speedy Albatross, but in maneuvres and tactics he was outmatched by the American, who came at him with such speed and directness that the witnesses, a thousand feet below, held

their breath in expectation of a crash that would bring both machines and their pilots to the ground a battered, mangled mass.

But the American pilot knew his game well. He swerved a little upward and over, just as the Hun took a swift nose dive to avoid contact. There was the rat-tat-tat of machine gun fire, that sounded from the distance more like the popping of toy guns. Neither made a hit, apparently, but the American plane had the position in which the Boche had to pass under, over or around him in any attempt to reach his own lines.

The German had no heart for battle and headed straight south. Again the American came at him like a streak of lightning, began to climb at the same time, and the enemy tried a downward sweep and a turn northward at the same time. The American turned, too, and those on the ground began to applaud at the advantage he had gained. He was but a relatively short distance behind, but at a much higher altitude.

As the Hun headed northeastward with all the speed he could get out of his Albatross, the American came down the wind, dropping as he came, and with momentum adding to the power of his propeller. When just within

range he opened up with a fusilade from his machine gun. The German tried swiftly to change his course, but the effort was made too late.

His plane was seen to hover for a moment first on one wing and then the other, as it seemed to come to a dead halt, and then, just as a little tongue of flame shot outward there was a loud explosion, the Albatross turned its nose downward and crashed to earth.

The American machine circled for a moment, as though the pilot were seeking his exact bearings, and then began a long, slow, gliding descent.

From all directions men by the score hurried over to where the machine would land, learn the identity and get a glimpse of the pilot who had furnished the entertainment.

As he came to the ground, the plane halted and the first of them gathered around, there was a gasp of astonishment and sympathy. the pilot lay back in his seat as white as a ghost, his left arm hung limp at his side, blood trickled from a wound in his shoulder, and obviously he would have fainted and fallen had the battle lasted a few moments longer.

"A stretcher!" cried a lieutenant of the

Aviation Corps, who had run to the spot to congratulate his colleague.

A stretcher was brought, and an ambulance came hurrying up. The man was unconscious when he was lifted in.

"Serious, but not fatal," was the abrupt diagnosis of a surgeon after a cursory examination. "Mostly weakness from loss of blood."

"But why did he stay up after being hit?" asked one man, more of himself than anyone else.

"The Hun would have been glad to get away at any time," put in another.

The lieutenant who had called for the stretcher turned in no unfriendly way toward them.

"He didn't come down until he'd gotten his objective," he said, "because of the stuff that he's got in him—the same stuff that you fellows have got, too. You'll be doing the same and just as good things on land, once you get started—and that won't be very long now."

He added the last few words in more of an undertone, as though speaking to himself, but everyone caught the significance of them.

"I believe it's a good sign," said Ollie

Ogden, as the three friends were slushing over the still slippery return journey, although the long rain had ceased early that morning.

"Believe what's a good sign?" demanded Harper, impatient that Ollie should be so indirect.

"The way that pilot stayed up and won his fight."

"Well, how s that a sign? A sign of what?" Tom broke in.

"Why," explained Ollie, "I believe it's a sort of a forecast of this new drive we're going into, and for that matter the whole war. Some of us may and will get hurt, but we're going to stick at it until we win, and we're going to make the quickest possible job of it."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Tom, "Only in our case we're not going to invite the enemy over our lines to do it. We're going to carry the fight to him."

"You're right," added Harper, "and this looks as if it's not many hours off."

He pointed to a long string of motor trucks bearing pioneers, engineers, snipers, wire-cutters—the forerunners of a battle in which preliminary difficulties must be overcome.

Tom looked at his wrist watch. It was 6.16 and the sun was just setting. Darkness would soon enclose that part of France in the cloak of night—and it was upon the eve of the fourth anniversary of German-established St. Mihiel saliant!

"Not long is right," he said, reminiscently.

And Harper added, while Ollie nodded his head in assent:

"We'll soon be ready to go."

CHAPTER III

The Silent Call to Battle

AT nine o'clock that night the order came. Or rather, it better be said, that it was nine o'clock, the appointed hour, when the top sergeants silently formed their men, reported to lieutenants, who in turn relayed the statements to captains, who passed them to majors, and thus to the colonels and the brigadier generals.

Not a word as to their destination; as few spoken orders as possible; very few lights.

The very air seemed to tingle with the mystery of it as Tom and George and Ollie fell into their places in the first platoon of Company C.

Company after company strode away until entire regiments were on the move. It was ten-thirty when Company C entered the march.

So far as the boys could determine, their direction was northeast, which was calculated to bring them in direct contact with the

entrenched Germans holding the southern leg of the St. Mihiel salient.

They had gone perhaps two miles, their own platoon somewhat separated now from the rest of the company as each unit took its own particular divergent route, when the lieutenant, Gaston by name, halted them for a moment while he consulted his wrist watch, and then, more guardedly, a map and the landscape thereabouts.

Those men would have gone anywhere for Gaston. He was one of those born leaders of men, but what was more, he was always willing to go where he would ask another man to take a risk. The men knew that, and as a result there was no finer morale in any platoon in the whole American army, which was saying a great deal.

"We're a trifle behind schedule," he announced in a quiet voice. "We'll hustle up a bit as we go down this incline."

And setting the pace himself, they dog-trotted for the next half mile. Then a second stop was made, and as the men under him watched his countenance by the brief glare of his pocket searchlight they knew that they had made up their lost time, and were now at the point where the program scheduled them to be at that particular moment.

Hardly a word was spoken. If one man wanted to speak to his "bunkie," he first gave him a slight nudge on the arm or in the ribs, and then leaned over close to whisper whatever it was he had to say.

Heavy clouds obscured the stars. It was a pitch black night. But despite that, there were few accidents, although a few of the lads stumbled and went to the ground, only to rise and adjust themselves without a word.

They passed through a thick wood, but the engineers had been before them, and there was at least the semblance of a broad path, now well beaten down by the hundreds of their fellow men who had passed through before them during the last two hours.

Once a felled tree which had not entirely flattened to the ground, broke off at the stump with a sharp crack and crunching sound. On the instant every man was flat on the soggy earth, listening, intent, ready for a surprise attack or any emergency.

But Tom recognized the voice of his own captain, fifty feet on the other side of it, instructing the men as to the route of their passage, and in a moment more they were again on their way.

They were coming now into the area of the

furthest obstacles and entanglements that had been thrown out by the Germans, and as they swung into a broad and fairly level road, the piles of barbed wire along its sides testified to the rapid, but efficient work of the wire-cutters who had been there for two preceding nights unobserved, and were even now but a short distance ahead, paving the way with the pioneers for the great hosts of infantry and tanks that soon were to attack the enemy.

"Lively now, men," Lieutenant Gaston instructed as they came upon this highway; and again they swung into a trot, after ten minutes of which, as though it had all been done by clock work, they closed in with the balance of Company C.

"If an enemy flare goes up, each man into the gutter along the roadside without a second's hesitation," Captain McCallum ordered. "And no noise from now on."

It was as though he had said to them: "A few hundred yards ahead are the enemy outposts, with sentries listening for the slightest warning." And indeed that was true.

They entered a rocky, shell-torn, treacherous field, where even the art and energy of the Engineers had failed entirely to fill all

the pits or level all the mounds thrown up by the powerful projectiles which the Boches had directed there.

The pace slackened, to avert accident or discovery, and the men literally crawled along, their unit only kept intact by each man keeping in touch with those on either side of him.

Their baptism of fire came while crossing this vast stretch of open ground. They were on their final lap of the march to the communication trenches when there was a roar from behind the German lines and a big shell broke almost directly in front of Company D.

By the spasm of light that accompanied the explosion the boys from Brighton saw at least half a dozen of D company men go down. Whether they were killed, wounded or merely thrown to the ground by the force of the shock they did not learn until later. But it proved that three men had been killed outright, two others fatally and a third slightly injured.

Tom and Ollie shuddered as Harper whispered the names, as they had been passed along from man to man. One of the killed was Henry Turner, as fine a fellow as ever breathed, as Tom himself learned when they had played guard positions opposite each

other on opposing boarding school football teams.

"Too bad," Ollie muttered. "Lots worse that could be better spared."

They were halted here for nearly ten minutes, the officers waiting for any further evidence that the enemy was aware of their movement, but apparently it was but a chance shot, for no other followed it. They resumed the advance, but even more cautiously than before.

They could sense rather than see now that before and about them on either side were thousands upon thousands of their own men, coming up in separate companies, becoming battalions and these in turn regiments, until whole brigades and entire divisions lay stretched along the line, waiting for the opening of the tremendous artillery bombardment and barrage that was to screen their final advance into the enemy's lines.

It was as Company C was entering the second line trenches from a tramway that an incident occurred that caused both mirth and many a heart pang.

The leading men in the first platoon came to a sudden halt and for no apparent reason did not immediately take up progress. There

was grumbling and growling, punctuated by sounds of suppressed mirth. When the delay had lengthened into minutes, and couriers had arrived from the commanders of both D and E companies, bearing their respects and asking if the line would not move on, Captain McCallum himself pressed impatiently forward to determine the cause of the hold-up.

He found the men in the lead maintaining a respectful distance from the rear end of an army mule that stood, with head down, ready to kick out at any moment, and effectively blocking the passageway.

"Buck" Granger, who was in the lead, informed the captain that the animal was adamant to all coaxing.

"See if you can slide by," Captain McCallum ordered.

"Buck" tried it. He was about midships of the mule when it suddenly leaned over against him. He was caught as though in a trap.

"Oh, gosh," he panted in misery.

"What's the matter now?" the captain demanded.

"Nothing," Granger answered with what breath he had left, "only it's Maud, and she's got me fast, paying up back debts."

"Three or four of you huskies try to lift her out of the trench," the officer then ordered, and as the designated number applied their strength to trying to budge the mule upward, half a dozen others clambered out of the trench to lend a helping hand from above.

But it was a useless effort. Not only were the men risking their life in futile efforts to raise the heavy beast, but the men above leaned over and whispered to the captain, "No use, there's a high wire fence on either side."

By this time the Germans—apparently without any knowledge of the movement beyond their lines, however—were letting go occasional shells.

"With the next blast from Fritz, shoot the beast," Captain McCallum ordered; for not only were his own men being delayed, but all of those who followed. The entire program might fall with the failure of the required regiments to be at their appointed place when the opening of the artillery signalled the forward movement behind a curtain of shells.

How Maud got there no one in the entire regiment could have told. It was like Maud —German spy, Tom had called her—to be forever upsetting law and order and the

best-laid plans. She was interfering now with the movement of a large part of an American army, and yet the lads who had known and loved the beast despite its unruly disposition felt much as though a personal friend thus was to be put forever out of the way.

A corporal who had mounted the trench side to try and help lift Maud out, jumped down in front of her and placed his pistol at her head.

"And be careful not to hit Granger," was the captain's final warning, as he again noticed "Buck," still in the vice-like grip and rapidly being crushed breathless.

The corporal pointed his pistol in such a way that the bullet could not endanger "Buck;" a German gun went off and simultaneously with it there was a flash at Maud's head, her whole body quivered for an instant, and then she went down in a heap.

The hundreds upon hundreds of men who followed those of Company C through that trench, stepped upon something big and bulky and soft, but none knew until later that it was the dead body of what had been one of the most cantankerous mules in the American army.

How the word came none knew, but nevertheless the various regiments hardly had taken up their appointed places before it became whispered from man to man that simultaneously with the American attack upon the southern wing of the St. Mihiel salient, the French were to launch an equally vigorous attack from the north.

It was satisfying information, or prediction, although the Americans, needless to say, required nothing to sharpen their enthusiasm, nothing to bolster up a courage which was prone at times even to sweep away discretion and better judgment and carry them into unnecessary hazards.

Nevertheless, it was good news to know that the poilus were "going in," too—that it was to be a strike-together battle for quick and indisputable supremacy.

It was not known until later how true the information was, but the German high command would have paid a fat price to have been apprised of it; for not only was it exactly what did happen, but had the Boches known of the plan undoubtedly they would have been able to put up a stouter defense, even though it was bound to crumble in the end under such terrific attacks as Foch and

Pershing launched against the armies which for four years had lain impregnable in that bulging line, a menace to the Allies in any forward movement that the Huns might be able to put under way.

The marvel of it all, though, to the men who entered the trenches that night, was the completeness and the readiness of the preparations for the opening of the battle they were to make.

When you, who read this, stop to think how long a distance 5,000 miles is, and then consider that just that amount of telephone wire, 5,000 miles, had been laid and connected for keeping every unit and the various commanding quarters in complete touch with every advance, every development, every emergency or contingency, you may realize, too, that these Americans were being sent in only after the most careful planning, and after every precaution of whatever nature had been taken to insure success. It was no haphazard undertaking, there was no reliance upon luck or chance. It was a scientific operation, computed and arranged to the last detail.

Not only that, but more than 100,000 detail maps and 40,000 photographs were

prepared, largely from aerial observations, and distributed to the officers in charge of carrying the operation forward. These maps and photographs showed practically every foot of ground to be traversed, every natural and artificial defense which they would be called upon to conquer, and put upon paper even more clearly than words could have expressed it the exact route and objective of every single company and platoon that was engaged in the fight.

And in addition to that, as the men of the regiment to which our friends were attached lay down upon their arms that night, awaiting the outbreak of the artillery onslaught which would indicate that the first phase of the battle was on, 10,000 men sat at the various instruments connected up to the improvised telephone system, and 3,000 carrier pigeons were being distributed among different units, to be released when their objectives had been obtained, or insurmountable difficulties were encountered—provided word could not be gotten back to headquarters by any other means.

Captain McCallum looked at his wrist watch, and then at a paper he held in his hand. He went down the trench repeating

the information which was the first thing definite that the men had learned since they started for the front.

"Our army is attacking along a twelve-mile front," he said. "Our own immediate objective for tomorrow will be Thiaucourt. I need not tell you more. That is our objective. It means that we must take that town. Pershing has placed his trust in you for that; so, also, has Marshal Foch. We are at about the centre of the line driving upon that point."

And without further word he passed along to another group, to which he issued the same information and instruction.

"Thiaucourt," repeated Tom, as the captain left. "Never heard of it before, but I guess it's got to be ours by tomorrow night."

"Righto!" assented Harper and Ollie together.

CHAPTER IV

The Thunder of Mars

NEVER has there been such a sudden and simultaneous crashing outburst of artillery of every conceivable kind and calibre as ripped the darkness and the silence at two-thirty o'clock on the morning of September 12th on the southern side of the St. Mihiel salient.

For the five minutes preceding the appointed time every officer of the staff and line had stood gazing at his wrist watch, counting off the seconds, knowing what was coming, waiting for it, wishing for it, and yet withal unprepared for the terrible shock which seemed to make the very earth rock and roar.

With such an uninterrupted banging and booming and screeching and swishing as never before had been heard upon the face of the earth, thousands upon thousands of guns, massed side by side along a line twelve miles long, were belching forth as in one

thunderous voice a new and world wide Declaration of Independence.

America, come to another continent to avenge mankind and save humanity and civilization, was pouring the wrath of the universe into the Hun lines and defenses.

Under the terrific shock of the thing men fell upon their faces in the trenches, their hands to their ears in a vain effort to shut out the screaming, nerve-racking death-cry of the cannon. The attempts were futile. Never for an instant did the guns pause; never was there the slightest break in their awful rhythm.

Men in the trenches whose duty still lay before them, marveled at the strength and endurance, the proficiency and the tenacity of those other men, far behind the lines, who were feeding, feeding, feeding shells into the maw of this tremendous array of artillery.

A veritable cloud of projectiles—death-dealing, trench-destroying shells—were being hurled over the heads of the infantrymen into the long-held defenses of the Boche.

And then, as if that was not enough for men to endure, just before they were to throw their own lives into the battle, the German guns began to reply.

They had no range, for the attack was a complete surprise. Had they been less self-complacent they might have realized that for days before, when an invincible fleet of aeroplanes of every description had kept their own air observers from flying over this area, something of great significance was under way.

But if they sensed it, their efforts to learn were of no avail, and so when the awful thunder of shelling began, they could only guess where the infantry and tanks were massed, which inevitably would follow in the wake of the artillery carnage.

So, when they opened up, terrifically, too, it is true, but with nothing like the force of the assault directed against them, it was with a sweeping shelling much like the playing of a searchlight over an area. It was not a barrage; it was more like the blind, helpless and hysterical hitting back of one who knows not where his opponent is.

Nevertheless shells fell dangerously near; and once a big one landed directly in the second line trenches, less than a hundred yards below where Company C was stationed. Its toll of death was appalling. A dozen men were blown to atoms. Rocks that had

been part of the trench formation were thrown in all directions, dealing death and injury as surely as the explosive itself.

The inadvertent first cry of a dozen injured men was enough to shake the nerves of the strongest; for after all in warfare, it is not so much the risking, or even the giving, of one's life, as it is the agonized suffering of others dying that makes a man quake, and for the moment falter.

Tom leaned over toward Harper and tried to shout something in his ear, but the effort was as useless as though the one had been dumb and the other deaf. It was absolutely impossible to make the human voice heard. When an officer wished to issue some brief order, it was only by signs that he could make himself understood.

Hour after hour it continued without the slightest halt.

Tom Walton began to wonder how much longer it would continue—how much longer such an earth-shaking onslaught *could* continue. Men who have gone through it know that the strain of such a thing, the absolutely inactive and helpless waiting, is the worst mental torture of all warfare, and far worse than rushing forth into battle which may mean almost certain death.

For a time thought seems to be suspended, and there is nothing but the frightful burst of explosions, during which one cannot think. And then comes a period of dulled senses—dulled to the present, and taking one into the past.

It is not like the mental sensations of a drowning man, in which the entire past life flashes before the mind in a clear but lightning-like panorama; but rather one takes up separate events, finds himself analyzing them for causes, motives; and, try to shake himself together as he will, cannot for the time rid himself of the melancholy fascination of it.

So it was with Tom Walton—perhaps also with Ollie Ogden and George Harper.

Men were not cowards who broke down and wept during that awful night. They were not afraid of bodily injury or death. It was the terrible strain upon nerves already strung taut with preparation for, and in anticipation of, the battle which they must fight and win. The very restraint which for the time curbed the fulfillment of their determination was the severest sort of sap upon their vitality.

Tom wondered at his own impersonal and

disinterested detachment as he stood watching a man of his own company wringing his hands, unable to repress his feelings, the tears rolling down his cheeks. He had known the fellow intimately for months. Twice he had seen him risk his life to aid a comrade. He gazed at him now, but his own feelings were caloused to the other's misery.

His own thoughts, strangely enough, were not of the present nor of the task so near at hand, but of his school days. And of all the incidents that crossed his mind, one stood out with particular insistence. It was shortly before he had entered Brighton, and when his mother, dear soul, was skimping herself of everything she could (as he knew now) to give him the education which she realized would be his asset later.

The day stood out before his distorted mind now as a great blot upon his whole career. He shuddered as he thought of it, and yet he could not turn his mind to other things. He reviewed it again and again.

He had started for school as usual that morning, but on his way had met companions. They, too, were pupils in the same school, but it was the late springtime of the year, and they were going to try the old swimming

hole. At first Tom refused to join them, but finally the temptation became too great.

He joined them in their truancy, and they started for what they planned to be a rollicking day. On their way they invaded an apple orchard and pulled branch after branch of the blossoms that, left to grow, would have become ripe and useful fruit. Tom's mother hardly would have believed that he would deliberately stay away from school, much less go swimming at that season when she had warned him that illness inevitably would be the result. But he had done both. And on their way home one of the lads, who had a sling-shot, had killed a chirping robin. It was probably that last act of heartlessness that showed Tom the exact character of the companions he had chosen for his day of deception.

That night he had had a chill, and for days his mother had nursed him through a sickness for which she could not account. And he had never told her. A feeling of revulsion and shame overcame him. For the time he even forgot the thousands of shells that were being hurled over his head. He wondered if in this battle he would be killed. A great longing came over him to see his mother,

and in the old spirit of boyhood confidence to tell her the whole story. Yes, if he should live, he would tell her at the first opportunity. He did not want anyone else to have the chance to tell her first.

And with the good resolution came mental relief. He seemed to come back to himself again, and looking about him began to speculate as to what sort of thoughts were passing through the minds of the men about him. From one to another he looked, wondering what confessions, if any, they would make if they could.

But in such an inferno as that neither introspection nor retrospection can last very long, and it was the nearby explosion of a heavy German shell, sending a shower of steel and rock fragments into the trench, that brought Tom Walton to a keen realization of the present. A piece of metal plate nearly circular in shape, fully three inches in diameter, and most peculiarly scrolled by the forces that had blown it from the shell, fell directly at his feet. He picked it up, examined it for a moment, and then dropped it into his blouse pocket as a souvenir of his first night under such a cannonading.

A lieutenant tapped him on the shoulder,

and he swung around as though shot. The officer smiled grimly an instant and thrust before Tom a sheet of paper on which was a brief instruction which could not be given verbally because of the din:

"We go over in forty-five minutes. Be ready when the artillery lets up."

Tom nodded and the lieutenant passed to Ollie and George Harper, and so on from man to man along the entire section of trench occupied by Company C.

In forty-five minutes! The time was getting close. Well, anything was better than remaining there motionless under such a strain, not knowing at what moment a Boche shell might come thundering into their shallow stopping place to spread sudden death and mortal injury.

Men began tightening and adjusting their equipment, examining their rifles, cartridge belts and small arms.

A Salvation Army man came down the trench lugging a great can of steaming coffee. The boys of Company C greeted him with cheers which their lips formed but their voices could not make heard; and as they took cautious quaffs of the hot beverage it seemed to soothe ragged nerves and give them new vigor.

Tom looked at his wrist watch and compared it with Harper's. They were exactly the same time. But half an hour now remained.

That instant marked another move in the game, too. In little groups men climbed out of the trench and went forward. Tom knew instinctively that they were the dare-devil wire-cutters—that the American artillery, adjusted like clockwork, had moved forward and these men were going out to cut away any entanglements that it had not smashed and entirely destroyed.

In this conflict war had become an exact science, and the men going out knew that except for an occasional German shell that might fall in their vicinity they were working behind an invincible screen of steel and fire.

There flashed across Tom Walton's mind the picture of General Pershing as he had seen him on the preceding day in conference with the officers who were to direct and carry out the gigantic project which he and the other great commanders had formulated; and in the recollection Tom found new confidence and determination. Whatever indecision may have possessed him fell away; it was as though he suddenly had been shorn of shackles which weighted him down; he

breathed in deeply of the powder-tainted air, and his only sensation was that of a great and noble strength of purpose.

Tom examined his watch again. But ten minutes more!

Suddenly, almost with as great a shock as it had begun, the firing ceased. If the expression can be made, the tremendous silence that fell upon the area came like a crash. For the men had become gradually tuned up to the dreadful uproar, and to have it abruptly break off set their heads ringing.

"Get ready, boys!" Captain McCallum's perfectly controlled voice spoke out down the trench, and the lads could hear other captains giving like orders to their own men.

And then the artillery began again, but it was more subdued than before. Tom looked upward and realized that the first streaks of dawn were stretching out across the sky.

He was immediately aware of something else, also. The smoke screen was being laid down!

This was the final of the preliminary moves to their "going over."

It began only a few yards out from the trench line and gradually moved off toward where the enemy had been undergoing such terrific punishment.

Lieutenant Gaston was alternating his attention upon the smoke screen and his watch. Tom looked at his own timepiece. It was 5.25 on the morning of September 12, 1918, four years to a day since the Germans had established the St. Mihiel salient!

Men were readjusting their steel helmets or tugging impatiently at uniform and equipment.

Captain McCallum raised his right arm and the men as best they could in their cramped quarters came to attention.

"Thiaucourt!" the commander shouted.

A great cheer came from every throat. It was taken up and echoed by companies on their right and on their left.

The captain again raised his right hand. His eyes were on his watch. The second hand was ticking round to 5.30.

The men stood with outstretched hands grasping the wall of the trench in front of them to leap up and out.

Abruptly the captain's hand fell. "Let's go."

And with a wild shout of exultation men of that company, and men of other companies on either side, miles up and down the trench, were up and over, in pursuit of the smoke screen—and the Hun.

CHAPTER V

Thiaucourt at Any Cost

SHOCK troops are all that the name itself implies. They are the troops sent forward, in human waves, to receive and break the first shock of contact with the enemy lines. Invariably a large number of them are doomed to death or injury, and the men themselves know it. But the very knowledge seems to drive them forward with greater fury, and the clash, therefore, is one of carnage for one or both sides.

These were the shock troops that were going over with the dawn against the entrenched Germans—if they still remained entrenched after the terrible fire to which they had been subjected for hours by the massed American artillery, augmented by the world-known French 75's.

Even through the rolling smoke screen the light was becoming stronger, and Tom, Ollie and Harper, plodding ahead rapidly with their comrades, knew that soon it would be full dawn, that the screen would be lifted,

and behind a barrage of fire that still would precede them for a short distance, the infantry would come to position to launch its close-range avalanche of rifle and machine gun bullets upon the enemy.

It was just as they were beginning to quicken the pace that Tom heard a grunt and a gasp, followed by a muttered word or two, and looking down upon his left side saw Ollie, almost up to his neck in a huge hole dug by one of the shells with which the Boche had made futile effort to stop the American fire.

Tom on one side and George Harper on the other, they managed to haul Ollie out, but the sudden drop had jarred him to the point of nausea and for several yards, as they double-quicked it to catch up with their line, they virtually carried their chum along, each of them holding to one of his arms.

Looking skyward Tom made another discovery. It was as though great flocks of giant birds peopled the air. Aeroplanes of every capacity and description and in various formations were maneuvering over their heads and beyond them.

Watching them as he trotted along, Tom saw from time to time a smaller scout plane

separate itself from its group and dart forward and out of sight over the enemy lines. Presently it would return, sometimes to remain with its squadron, at others to continue back to some signalling point in the rear, from which it relayed the facts of the German's position or movements.

Massive battle and bombing planes plowed along, their powerful motors beating a tremendous bass throb as their big propellers churned the air.

Here and there, too, were anchored observation baloons, the observers in them, equipped with parachutes for a long jump to safety at any time, sitting at telephone instruments connected with the various headquarters.

On the land and in the sky the battle was on—the history-making battle of the St. Mihiel salient!

Once a German aero battle fleet that a few months before would have been considered the most formidable fighting unit that ever took the air, sailed forward as if to engage the American gunners and pilots in a struggle; but either their courage failed them or better judgment prevailed, for there was a quick signal from the leader of the group,

and with greater speed than they had approached they turned and fled toward their own lines.

"Fritz isn't feeling very well this morning," the irrepressible "Buck" Granger shouted, and a merry shout arose from the men who were within hearing of the remark.

And, indeed, it seemed to be the truth. Fritz was getting some of his own medicine, and apparently he considered it a rather bitter dose.

The smoke ahead began to dissipate itself in the brisk early morning breeze, and the men had their first realization that the firing behind them had almost ceased.

In subdued voices the officers were now counselling their men to use all reasonable precaution; and indeed the orders were necessary, for the lads, now this far upon their errand of victory, were ready to plunge ahead, regardless of all hazards.

And then in another instant the whole thing was on. Tom did not hear the order given. As he thought the thing over afterward, he wondered if any actual order had been uttered. It was a matter of doubt, not only with himself, but with many other of the men. But after all that was a matter of only secondary moment.

They were in—those men in the first wave of shock companies—and now they were racing like mad toward where the enemy lay waiting.

They were within fifty yards of the wood which was their immediate objective when they suddenly were made aware that it was a veritable wasp's nest of hidden machine guns. With disconcerting unison they began to spit their bullets at the American lines, and the men, trained to just such a contingency, fell flat upon their stomachs with such alacrity that none could tell which or how many had been killed or wounded by this first defense of the hidden Huns.

The machine guns continued their murderous sput-sput-sput, but the range was over the heads of the men as they stealthily edged forward, now in scattered, zig-zag line.

Tom saw George Harper train his gun upon the thick foliage of a near tree, and, almost on the instant that he fired, a huge German came toppling through the branches and to the ground.

"Number one," Harper muttered, with set jaw. But another sharp-shooter had picked him out, and he had hardly said the words when a bullet flattened itself against his

helmet with such force as to drive it down over his eyes.

A sergeant crawled past where Tom and Ollie were scraping their way forward. "I want three men to go with me to get that nearest machine gun nest," he whispered, "you two come along."

As Tom and Ollie followed as cautiously as they could, they realized that the third man was their old friend, "Buck" Granger. "A little action at last," he grumbled, good-naturedly, as he wiped from his eye a chunk of dirt that had been thrown up by a bullet which plowed into the ground less than a foot ahead of him. "This is the real stuff."

The sergeant warned them to be careful not to raise their voices. They were making their way through a patch of tall weeds and grass, and the object was to move as rapidly as possible, and yet with every caution, so that they might overtake the nest without themselves being discovered.

Further to the left of them some of their own men already had risen again and were rushing toward the wood. This particular gun was trained upon them, and Tom gritted his teeth in silent resolution of revenge as he saw it send forth its hail of bullets, mow-

Ollie Hurled a Grenade Directly Into the Group That Remained.

ing down three Americans, painfully if not mortally wounded.

They were within fifteen yards of the spot when the tallest of the four Germans visible discovered them approaching. He muttered some gutteral sound of warning to his companions, but it was his last word, for the sergeant picked him off with a clean shot through the heart.

Hardly had the sergeant's rifle spoken when Ollie, with the strength and aim he had gained on many a long throw straight from second base to the home plate in many a hard-fought baseball game, hurled a grenade directly into the group that remained. As the smoke cleared, Tom was at the gun, swung it about and turned it full upon a clump of bushes from which another batch of Boches were attemptng to stop or stem the irresistible tide of American oncomers.

They attempted to surrender, but as through a trumpet Tom heard the shouted order of a major, "On, on! No quarter!" And with what had been their own weapon a few moments before, another half dozen of the enemy went to their Judgment.

Far ahead of them German guns were hurling shells at the point where the fight

was becoming thickest, but for the time their range was sufficiently short to be inflicting more damage upon their own troops than upon the Americans. The battle was now becoming hotter with each moment, for while the first wave of shock troops was going forward with unconquerable valor, the Germans who were on the very rear of a vast retreating host were stubbornly contesting each foot of the way, marveling at the bravery of their opponents, not realizing that the avalanche of men throwing themselves upon them were fighting, not because they had been ordered or compelled to, but because they had before them every instant of the time the ideal of liberty and freedom which brought the United States into the conflict.

With a detonation that threw Tom and several other of the men flat upon the ground, a tremenduous German shell exploded just ahead of them. It sent a great cloud of earth and rock into the air, and before they could arise a big tree, that had been completely uprooted by the projectile fell directly toward them. The others rolled out of the way, but Tom was not quick enough. One of the large branches pinned both his legs to the ground.

As he tugged in vain to get his freedom,

George Harper crawled over to him. "Lay still for a moment," he instructed his friend, "I think I can get you out."

With bullets whistling and singing all about them, with now and then a shell screaming its death message almost into the pit where Tom lay an impatient prisoner, the two lads worked frantically, but to little avail. Although his legs lay in a slight depression, which left him free of the weight of the huge tree, he was nevertheless held fast, and at last Tom began to urge Harper to abandon him there until others came along.

"I'll dig you out," his friend replied, at the same time poising his bayonetted rifle for the job of scooping out enough earth to permit Tom to slip his legs out of the trap.

Harper was in that position when suddenly his eye caught something in the fallen tree which made him swerve suddenly. "You beast!" he cried, and with all the gathered force of his strong body he flung his rifle, as a primitive savage would a spear, into the nearby branches.

Tom, looking at that instant, saw the bayonet sink to the hilt in a brutal-looking German who at that instant was bringing up his gun to fire upon them. With one agonized

grunt he crumbled, and then lay still; and Harper, averting his head, recovered his weapon.

Obviously the Boche had been an enemy sharp-shooter hidden in the upper branches of the tree, and until that moment had remained stunned by the force of the fall precipitated by a shell from his own lines.

Harper set to work instantly to dig Tom out, but it was not an easy job. As he lay there, virtually helpless, gazing up at the sky and at the scores of aeroplanes dashing, dodging, cruising about, he gave a gasp of astonishment which also attracted his friend's attention.

With consummate daring a Boche pilot had dodged the apparently impenetrable American air defenses, and, with half a dozen planes pursuing and attacking him, was making straight toward a big anchored observation balloon that hung motionless in the air a little to the north of where the first wave of shock troops thus far had progressed.

The tremendous pounding of the motors rose even above the din of big and little guns. From every point Allied planes were sweeping down upon the Hun machine, but before

they could overtake him he had fired an incendiary bullet at the balloon with unerring aim.

As it burst into a mass of flames that were lurid, even in the now broad daylight, the two men who had been occupying it as observers jumped out. There was nothing else for them to do, and probably it was not their first parachute descent from a great height. Nevertheless Tom gave an involuntary gasp at the apparent cool courage of the men as they leaped into space, and, for a distance of fully a hundred feet, shot down with tremendous speed toward the earth until their parachutes opened up.

They landed upon the opposite side of the wood, and the men who had watched them never learned whether they escaped in safety or were killed in the inferno into which they landed.

In five minutes more Tom was free. The fight by that time had forged steadily ahead, and beyond the delay of stopping to ease the dying moments of one brave fellow with a last gulp of water, they rushed forward to join the others of their platoon.

As they passed through the wood, which stretched longitudinally for a considerable

distance, but was comparatively shallow in depth, they saw scores of Germans and not a few of their own men, most of them dead, others mortally wounded and dying, others temporarily incapacitated but not so seriously hurt, trying to staunch their own wounds and hobble back to first aid stations.

It was a sight that struck to the very heart of the lads, but looking backward for an instant they saw the second wave of indomitable men approaching, and scattered through the occasional breaches in their lines they saw that emblem of tender care and mercy, the Red Cross.

Where the Germans previously had dug in, just behind the line of the wood, was now a havoc of wreck and ruin, the whole earth thereabouts having been churned and plowed and furrowed by the terrific artillery fire which the Americans had poured in preliminary to the advance.

From where they had swung round the eastern end of the miniature forest, hundreds of tanks were now bobbing up and down like great, clumsy, fire-spitting beetles, as they lumbered across this chaos of mounds and gullies, paving the way for the renewed infantry attack that would open with the arrival of the second wave of shock troops.

Actual fighting had been going on little more than an hour, and yet the Americans had progressed more than a mile beyond where the first German line had been encountered, had taken what the Boche had regarded as an almost impregnable wood, peopled as it was with sharp-shooters and hundreds of machine gun nests, and by the sheer courage and determination of their attack had struck fear to the heart of the Hun.

Losses had been heavy, but they were slight as compared with the casualties of the Germans. It had been a fearful ordeal, and the attack really had but just begun. The men were begrimed, powder-stained and most of them crusted with mud. But they were as invincible now as when they started—and more anxious to continue.

Major Sweeney, his own left hand roughly bound in a handkerchief betokening a wound of some sort, dashed up for a hurried word as he passed along the line.

"Brave work!" he shouted. "You are doing no less than was expected of you, but much remains yet to be done. Make good use of your short breathing spell. The next half mile ought to be comparatively easy but

beyond that it will be more difficult. No one of us, however, can have doubt of the result. Civilization never will forget what sacrifices you are making for it today. We must not weaken for a moment now.

"The enemy already is upon the verge of an utter rout. We must make it complete. He will stop a little further on to marshal his forces and make a desperate and determined stand. So far as possible we must prevent him from succeeding in that aim. We must keep him moving so fast that he will be unable again to reorganize his forces for effective resistance.

"All reports indicate that we are obtaining our objectives at every point along the line. Upon you men devolves the responsibility of taking Thiaucourt—Thiaucourt at all costs."

CHAPTER VI

Blasting the Enemy Out

THE cheer which greeted Major Sweeney's speech was of itself a pledge. The first of the men in the second wave were arriving by that time at that point where Company C, a little frazzled, but with renewed determination, had rallied those of its men who had come through the first attack uninjured. The new arrivals gave fresh energy and impetus to those who thus far had borne the brunt of the original contact, and again they made ready to resume the big push.

The sun had come out for the first time in more than a week, and those who were aware of it, who were cheered and strengthened by its genial glow, believed that they saw in the incident something significant of success for the attack that had been so auspiciously launched.

Undoubtedly, from the first trend that the battle had taken, the Germans had been caught unawares, and there was little doubt,

either, that the onslaught, coming as it did upon the fourth anniversay of their undisputed possession of the St. Mihiel salient, contributed further toward disorganizing the enemy and completely breaking down his much-vaunted discipline and morale. The wisdom of American generalship dictated that he should not be given a moment's rest in which to recover.

By re-formed platoons and companies, the vacancies filled in by the new arrivals, officers and men began to move forward again to hasten the Hun in his precipitate retreat.

They had not gone many more yards, picking their way from knoll to knoll, when they began to sense something of the real horror of warfare as the Germans waged it. Sticking out here and there above the surface of the ground like grim and ghastly monuments were battered heaps of stone and mortar—all that remained of houses which once had stood there. This site had been a village once!

But what ruin had been wrought there! What scenes of carnage, of brutality and outright murder had been enacted here upon this spot that the Americans were now traversing? How many innocent noncombat-

ants—aged men and women, defenseless little children—had had their lives snuffed out, or were tortured to death, or were driven like haunted wild beasts before that relentless, pitiless advance of the Boches four years before?

Tom Walton, asking himself these things, horrified by the thoughts and the terrible picture they conjured, even as he threw himself forward with the rest could not help comparing this barren desolation of what once had been a thriving, happy, harmless community, with the peace and quiet of his own country, even though it was at war, and with the content and safety which he and his kin always had known there. To Tom the wretched scene about him was like a terrible nightmare, and yet he knew that it was in fact all too tragic reality.

Unquestionably the day—not *Der Tag*, of which the Germans had so brutally and boastfully spoken for four long years—but a far different day, the Day of Retribution, was now near at hand. It could not come too swiftly or severely to avenge the horrors which German invasion, Hun brutality and Boche atrocity had inflicted upon the people and the land of Belgium and eastern France.

Stirring as were these reflections, thrown with lightning-like rapidity across the mind of Tom Walton and perhaps scores of others who were fighting side by side with him, they were but passing thoughts which speedily gave way to the stern and hazardous realities of the moment as a hail of machine bullets from a dozen hidden nests again challenged, and for a time halted, their further advance.

It was another of those long, narrow, intermittent stretches of wooded land that they were approaching, and somehow, by the exertion of almost superhuman efforts, the Germans had thrown a hasty but temporarily effective barbed wire entanglement in front of it. It was another of those obstacles which cost lives to overcome, but which had to be thrown aside with the least delay in order that the enemy might not have time to marshal a recouped strength against the oncoming line.

But of the great fleet of aeroplanes that kept dashing back and forth above, one which had been especially assigned to watch and report their progress, hovering over them like a powerful winged guardian, had seen their predicament and even as the cloud of machine gun bullets mowed the first

unfortunate ones down the message had been flashed to brigade headquarters, and almost in the same instant an order to action had been flashed to the commander of a nearby squadron of heavy tanks that just had performed a like service a short distance up the line.

Prostrate upon the ground, but with no other protection than an occasional shell hole afforded the luckiest of them, the men saw the tanks swerve in their course and come in their direction. Crawling, rolling, both right and left, they opened an avenue through which they might pass

With a loud and joyous shout that rose high above the dismal song of death of the bullets, the harried soldiers greeted the lumbering, jolting approaching of the "Treat 'em Rough" branch of the American service.

Dipping into ditches and shell holes, but just as majestically taking the sharp and rugged rises in the ground, bobbing, gliding, sliding like antediluvian many-legged serpent-beasts, they came on at a jogging, uneven pace, much as might a great herd of giant, iron-hided elephants, puffing and snorting and spouting forth fire.

To avoid casualties they slowed up and

proceeded cautiously through the little lane created for them, flanked on either side by indomitable doughboys, only awaiting their passage through to be up and at the enemy again, and who now, prostrate upon the ground, were taking pot shots at the sheltered Germans operating the machine guns.

But once past that point where they might hit or run down their own men, the tanks proceeded with all the power and speed they possessed straight for the sappling wood and the wire entanglements in front of it. Machine gun bullets pelted against their tops and sides as harmlessly as drops of rain upon a roof. Invincible to everything but the larger guns, which had not yet made their range, so viciously did the Americans in the skies fight off the enemy observers, they plodded on, barbed wire twisting and snapping, trees cracking off and falling before their terrible assault.

Some of the men already were up and running in the path of the iron monsters when the shrill whistle of their captain brought them to the ground. The tanks were coming backward. To the uninitiated it seemed that they were in full and precipitate retreat. For a distance of perhaps forty feet they backed,

while many wide-eyed Americans looked on in wonder; then they as suddenly halted, and a second later again went forward.

They had returned for a renewed momentum with which to mow down the heavier trees which had obstructed their course already slowed down by contact with the outer fringe of the wood.

Suddenly, as though from out the sky, there was a veritable avalanche of fire and shell. Projectiles exploded everywhere, annihilating men in the terrible force of their concussion, laying others low with the deadly rain of bullets and jagged chunks of shrapnel.

Tom with a sinking heart saw Ollie go down like a log, but a couple of moments later he was on his knees, adjusting his helmet and putting more ammunition into his rifle. Hours afterward Tom learned that Ollie's helmet had saved him, a piece of iron having been driven against it with such force as to knock him down and for the moment stun him.

But even as Ollie at the time was getting to his feet, Tom felt something hit him in the chest with a tremendous blow, and he went staggering backward, feeling for the wound. His blouse was torn, almost over the

heart, and as he regained his breath he felt cautiously inside, certain he would withdraw his hand covered with blood. Instead he felt something hard and flat, with a sharp dent nearly in the middle. He drew it forth. It was a piece of metal plate nearly circular in shape and fully three inches in diameter. It was the piece of German shrapnel he had dropped into his blouse pocket hours before while in the trench, and undoubtedly it had saved his life.

But it was only an inwardly muttered word of gratitude that Tom had time for then, though he had seen his chum and himself almost miraculously escape death within the same minute. There was no living in the terrific downpour of shells with which the Germans desperately were trying to halt the American advance. To go backward was almost like admitting defeat, and no man had even a thought of that. There was but one course open, and that immediately was ordered by Major Sweeney, in charge of that particular part of the line.

Of the five hundred men who had been hurled at that particular position, at least ten per cent had been killed off or wounded in that fiery concentration of Hun artillery.

There was no time to move the wounded then; it was a case of get the uninjured out as soon and as safely as possible. In the stress of bitter battle conservation of fighting strength, man-power, often becomes the biggest consideration.

Therefore the units were divided into two groups, one to strike eastward and the other westward, to flank the wood in a northward movement and at the same time to advance more rapidly than German air scouts could trace and report their position to the artillery that was blasting away at them.

Tom and George Harper were in a squad chosen immediately to go forward as scouts on the enemy's eastern wing to endeavor to ascertain the exact strength there, and, if possible, to learn the location of the machine gun nests from which the Boche were adding to the havoc wrought by their artillery further back. Their work was most hazardous. Only the most cautious advance could obscure their movements from dozens of snipers hidden in the thick foliage of the trees. Most of the tanks either had been crippled by the shell fire or had been ordered to a safer distance back, and only the best strategy could bring the infantry into a position where it could storm and take the woods.

Under the leadership of a sergeant the scouts crept forward. They attempted to make a detour, but there was no cover of darkness to obscure them; there was but a scattering growth of scraggly weeds and upturned rocks, and when but a short distance on their mission a fusilade of bullets that tore up the ground directly before them gave them ample notice that they were not unnoticed—in fact were about to be the especial targets of German marksmanship.

Tom tumbled into the shell hole nearest him, and he saw Harper do the same only a few feet away. But as Tom rolled himself into his place of safety he landed upon something cushiony and soft. His landing also was accompanied by an angry grunt. It came from directly beneath him. In a flash Tom had turned and at the same time maneuvered himself to his hands and knees. He was directly astraddle a fat German.

The American lad took in the situation in a glance. The Boche was bleeding from a wound in the left hand, but otherwise, so far as Tom could see, he was uninjured. But if he had deliberately flopped into that hole to avoid further fighting and surrender himself in safety to the advancing American

troops, at least he had not forgotten the characteristic treachery of his training, for apparently he felt it would be a good piece of work first to deprive the United States of one more fighting man.

He already had his revolver in his hand when Tom managed to turn around, and with a quick upward jerk he sought to bring it into range. But Tom Walton had not been the champion wrestler at Brighton for nothing, nor had he forgotten any of the jiu-jutsu movements which made him the peer of any of his pals in any rough-and-tumble contest. With a quick upward movement of his right hand he gave the German's arm a twist which made the shot a harmless one as he pulled the trigger. At the same moment he brought his knee down in the man's stomach with a force that jolted the breath almost completely out of him. But the German was a powerful man, despite his excess flesh, and as he made a grab for Tom's arm he also partly rolled over in a way to endanger the younger man's balance. Again he tried to bring the gun into play, but with a forward dive Tom took the only desperate course open to him and sunk his teeth deep into the Hun's wrist.

With a howl of rage and pain the fellow began to yell "Kamarad! Kamarad!" but Tom had experienced enough by this time to know that his own life was not safe there so long as that treacherous German remained able to inflict an injury upon him.

Pinning the German's gun arm down to the ground, Tom suddenly raised his head, and as suddenly lowered it again and with all his weight smashed into the Boche's face, billy-goat fashion. With a string of gutteral sounds which Tom took to be oaths, his enemy tried in vain to avoid this new attack. It was an entirely new brand of fighting to him, and what was worse in view of his whole training, he was fast in close quarters and could not hit and run. Before he had fully recovered from this last shock Tom had managed to draw his own gun. He fired, but without time for any deliberate aim. The German was just raising his own revolver, but his arm dropped back limp and his eyes rolled up into his head.

With a shudder—for he had not yet become accustomed to seeing men die—Tom suddenly leaned forward, a feeling of sorrow overcoming him, despite himself. But there was no need of asking questions. The German was no

longer a menace to any man. The bullet had hit him almost directly over the heart, and his death had been instantaneous.

Further consideration was cut short, however, when the sergeant crawled over to the same shell hole.

"I've reported to the major," he said, "and there's no use of our attempting to go further alone. Be ready for a sudden rush attack and join in. What's that you've got there?" he asked, suddenly becoming aware of the German under Tom.

"He's done," came the even answer. "He tried to get me first when I rolled in here, and we had quite a set-to, but I was just a little quicker on the trigger than he was."

"Good!" the sergeant exclaimed, and then, in the same breath, "Our fellows are coming now. Be ready to jump out when they're about alongside. "We're going to take that wood and every living German in it."

And as the sergeant a few seconds later gave the word, Tom leapt out and joined in the rush upon the wood. As he did so he saw Ollie Ogden coming along with the rest. But he looked in vain for his Brighton friend and fellow scout, George Harper. He was nowhere about.

CHAPTER VII

The Battle in the Wood

WEARIED as they were with the long hours of fighting, preceded by a night of the most nerve-racking vigil and anticipation, those lads went across that intervening space and into the very jaws of death as though it was their customary exercise before breakfast each morning—went singing, shouting and cheering, oblivious to danger, seeing only a duty to perform in the quickest possible way.

For a full minute after the Americans began their fearless dash, Heinie and Fritz were so utterly dumbfounded by the utter audaciousness of the assault that, except for the steady descent of the heavy shells which were falling harmlessly many yards away, firing practically ceased. Consternation seemed to seize the German snipers and crews which manned the hidden machine guns. The assault was so boldly carried out, the attack was so swift and vicious, that before they could recover themselves

the Americans were upon them, and mortal man-to-man combat was on.

Those who could get away in safety began to run, but the two groups which had been divided to escape the artillery fire had carried on a simultaneously converging movement, and most of those who occupied the miniature forest were caught in a trap and compelled to fight.

Tom had gotten only a dozen yards into the wood when he stumbled and fell. As he fell he rolled down a short incline and into the very heart of a machine gun nest. Apparently the five Huns there were more startled than he was, but he did not wait to inquire. With a quick backward somersault he hurtled himself out of the place, and as he came to his feet he threw a grenade. It struck upon the machine gun itself, and exploded with a force that made his teeth shake, but it did the work and saved his life, at the same time eliminating five more menaces to the peace of the world and human happiness.

Off to the left a machine gun of the enemy was playing a vicious tattoo. Tom saw it mow down four of his comrades, and realized that situated as it was it was there to do a

great deal more damage if it was not captured and its crew taken prisoners or killed. He felt as though he, too, had been hit, and then, from tree to tree, began worming his way along the ground.

He had just reloaded his rifle, in which the bayonet was fixed, but he had thrown his last grenade. He stopped for a moment by a comrade who would never again need his. Tenderly he clutched the explosive to him and continued on his way.

He was almost to the spot, and realized, too, that he had gotten away from all the rest, who were bearing off in a diagonal direction, when he saw something darting along the ground just ahead of him. At first, in the semi-darkness of the wood, he thought it was nothing but a shadow, perhaps only a delusion of his eye or brain, but as he paused it moved again, scarcely discernible as its own color mingled with that of the ground.

But Tom knew that it was a German—and seemingly an officer—who was trying to get away while the getting was good. He determined that the German had not yet seen him, and cautiously took up the trail, especially as it was in the general direction toward the machine gun nest. He might

have shot the man then, but the shot would have revealed his own whereabouts and probably save the machine gun crew, as well as cost him his own life.

Watching every move that his quarry made, Tom stalked him as noiselessly as an American woodsman would follow a wary animal's trail. He noticed as the Boche went along on the ground, he seemed to draw himself forward with only the right arm, the other hanging limp at his side. A little further on Tom found the faint pathway spotted with blood. He crept closer. As he did so he inadvertently stuck one of his own hands into a smouldering pile of leaves which had been set afire by a bomb or shell, and the exclamation that escaped him made it impossible longer to keep his presence there unknown.

The German turned quickly. Tom noted all in one glance that he wore a fierce bristly mustache turned up at the ends after the style of Wilhelm, the Arch-Murderer, that his complexion now was a greenish-white, and that his left arm had been shot completely off just below the elbow. But he noted something more than that, even while he covered the man with his gun, and the latter

stuck his right hand into the air in token of surrender. The man was a colonel in the Prussian Guards! A regimental commander in what the Kaiser himself regarded as his crack troops!

Tom gasped in astonishment. Seeing that the other made no move to get his own weapon, the younger man lowered his rifle the least bit, at the same time rose, first to his knees and then to his feet, and then commanded the German officer to stand up.

"But keep that arm in the air, Colonel," he cautioned vigorously, "or I might get nervous and pull this trigger."

Apparently the officer understood, and maybe, too, he had some sense of humor, for he not only did as Tom bade him to do, but the features that were distorted with the torture of pain and fast ebbing strength, for an instant were softened by just the flicker of a smile.

"You seem to be just a little more decent than the rest, anyway," Tom continued, "and that arm needs attention pretty badly. I'll let that machine gun nest go for a few moments while I turn you over to be taken back a prisoner, and for treatment."

"I thank you very much for sparing my

life and giving me this attention," the German colonel responded, in almost perfect English. "You are very kind."

As Tom fell in behind him, after having directed him which way to walk, he began to marvel over the man's accent, and in a guarded way to admire the manner in which he bore what must have been the agonizing pain of his injury.

They had almost reached the point where Tom could turn his prisoner over to those who would take him in charge and transfer him to the rear and to a hospital, when they came upon George Harper, propped up against a tree, apparently asleep.

But as he heard them approach he opened his eyes, and then he did what to Tom seemed a strange and unaccountable thing. He jumped to his feet, showing no evidence of a wound or other injury, and then, gazing intently into the face of Tom's high-ranking prisoner, took a few more steps forward.

"Why, Professor Schultz," he exclaimed. "If it isn't the professor I'll eat my helmet. And with one wing gone, too, eh? You're not looking quite so well, professor, as when I saw you last."

Tom, who had listened to this in surprise,

turned toward the colonel as though expecting him to explain it, but the German officer only tried to tilt his head a little higher, make his mustaches appear a little more formidable, and maintained an absolute silence.

"He don't want to recognize me now," Harper explained to Tom. "He's got good reasons, too. The only good it will do him to have that arm fixed up, now that he's recognized, will be to get well enough to be stood up before a firing squad."

The erstwhile proud colonel made a move as though he would make a dash for his liberty.

"Oh, no you don't," George Harper snapped, at the same time levelling his gun at the officer. "No more of that funny work this time."

Keeping the prisoner covered with his gun, he turned again to Tom.

"This professor-colonel and I have met before," he explained, "and the latest time was a few hours ago. I got separated from you fellows and tried to rush a machine gun nest. I was just about to throw a grenade when this fellow caught me in the stomach with a whacking big rock. It was the handi-

est weapon to him, for his revolver had been shot out of his hand. I'll say for him that he throws well. It knocked me out completely. When I came to my senses I could hardly move, but I remembered one thing, and that was that the man who laid me low was the one-time Professor Schultz, confidence man and swindler, indicted and sought by half a dozen different States, but particularly wanted by the United States Secret Service as a daring and dangerous spy. Some record you've got, eh, Schultzy—pardon, professor, I should address you as colonel—the crookedest colonel I ever knew."

"Will you take him back?" Tom asked, amused despite himself at the manner in which George Harper delivered himself of his information regarding Schultz.

"I sure will," his pal responded. "I want to get back into the thing as soon as ever I can, but honest, that fellow sure can heave a rock, and I feel as though some of my intrals have gotten too crowded together. Maybe I need a little repairing myself. I'll be right back again, though. Come on, Schultzy," and Harper and his prisoner trudged off.

Tom started back for the machine gun emplacement which had been his objective

when the German colonel crossed his path, but he found it had long since been silenced and swept aside, and his own comrades were far ahead of where they had been when he took his prisoner.

They were now nearing the other side of the wood, with its open land beyond, but the rear guard of the Germans still were fighting stubbornly, the reason for which Tom learned later. The only way the German officers could compel those poor dupes left in the rear, to stand and fight until the rest had started well upon their escape, was to tell them that the Americans were barbarians in war and, if they captured German soldiers, would torture them to death. A Boche prisoner, fearful even of accepting a cigarette, fearing it was poisoned, until the man who offered it stuck it into his own mouth and began to smoke, finally told his captors the secret of what they previously had put down to courage upon the part of the Hun fighters.

Tom, coming upon the rigid resistance as it was being shown at the fringe of the wood, jumped into the thick of the fight just as "Buck" Granger went down with a bullet wound in his right leg. "I'm all right, don't bother about me," the brave fellow shouted,

as Tom wavered and was about to stop. "Just a little hit in the calf. I'll hobble along all right."

"Better stay where you are," Tom advsied him, "and if I come through myself I'll be back for you later in the day. The Red Cross stretcher men will be along shortly anyway, and they'll give you a lift."

The injured man nodded, the while he nursed his injured leg, the knee drawn up under his chin, and Tom started off.

"Say!" Granger shouted, before he was out of hearing, "just give Fritz a couple for me, will you?"

"Do my best," Tom called back, and disappeared.

He was no more than out of "Buck's" sight when a German, lying prone upon the ground, and whom Tom thought dead, fired point blank at him. The bullet tore through his right sleeve and left a stinging sensation on his arm. With fixed bayonet he charged before the man could shoot again.

It was the second man he had killed at close range that day. The sight sickened him. He hurried on. There was the great difference in the armies. The Germans seemingly killed for the lust of killing. The Americans,

only because it was the only way in which to save humanity, rescue or aid martyr nations, and redeem civilization to the world.

As he reached the edge of the wood, a hundred feet from the nearest of his own men, he thought he heard a voice weakly calling him—calling him by his own name.

"Tom Walton!" Silence, as he looked around; and then again, "Tom Walton! Here I am, over here."

It was scarcely more than a weak and quavering whisper, and the very ghastliness of it sent the chills running up and down Tom's spine as fire and bullets couldn't make them do.

He looked in the direction from whence the voice seemed to come, and saw a man in an American officer's uniform stretched out upon the ground. His face was smeared with mud and blood and was distorted in mortal agony.

Tom ran to his side. He was tugging at his blouse, as though to open it. Tom gazed into his face again, and then gave a gasp of shock and astonishment.

"Why, Major," he gulped, "Major Sweeney, are you badly hurt?"

The officer tried to answer, just the effort

of a smile flickered for a moment on his swollen lips, and he weakly motioned toward Tom's water flask.

A few swallows seemed to relieve him a little, and with his head pillowed in Tom's arm he tried to move a bit, but it was no use. The attempt was too painful, and he was fearfully weak. Tom instantly realized that. He looked around desperately for help, but there was none immediately at hand. The major, evidently divining his intention, gave a slight wave of the hand. It expressed much. It was the inborn heroism of the man —the man under whom Tom had trained and come over seas, the man for whom he had the greatest respect and the deepest affection.

"In there," the major gasped, after a terrible effort, motioning toward an inner pocket. "Important papers—took them from German—officer."

Tom reached into the pocket and extracted what seemed to be a packet of maps and instructions. Major Sweeney was lapsing into unconsciousness, but he rallied himself with a great effort, and, in a voice which Tom now had to lean close to hear, he continued:

"Take them—to—brigade head—quarters," he reached feebly and let his own quivering hand drop upon Tom's. "Tell them—Major Sweeney—sends—his—respects and he's—going west."

The voice ceased, the big frame quivered slightly for just the fraction of an instant, and then lay still. Tom Walton knew that for his brave major the end had come. Gently he laid the form upon the ground. Tears were running down his cheeks. Tenderly, as though it had been his own father, he smoothed back the matted hair.

"Major Sweeney," he repeated, in a choked whisper. "Gone west."

And then the long tension snapped, his head dropped forward and his body was shaken by convulsive sobs.

CHAPTER VIII

Advancement for Tom

BUT if there is sadness in battle, so also at times does it have its humorous aspects, some of which are ludicrous to an extreme.

It was just that sort of a reaction that Tom Walton got when, having laid the body of Major Sweeney on a little knoll by the side of a tree, he again laid siege to the enemy line.

By this time it was a general free-for-all at that particular point, and it was vicious and close-range fighting. Tom was having all he could do to defy two Germans, one of whom was doing his best to bayonet him, while the other was trying to brain him with a rifle butt, when Ollie Ogden suddenly appeared upon the scene.

With a single leap—and no one to this day knows why he adopted that method of attack, except that men often do strange things in the stress of battle,—Ollie was upon the back of the man trying the bayonetting.

His two arms were gripped about the German's throat, and his feet were twined affectionately around his waist and over the stomach. From all appearances he was there to stay awhile.

The other German—he who had been so seriously intent upon crushing Tom's head in with the butt of his rifle—was so startled by the strange performance that he stood gazing as though stricken, while Tom with a sudden wrench took the gun from him and added him to the list of prisoners.

But by this time a dozen men on both sides had abruptly suspended hostilities to watch the antics of the big German with Ollie on his back. The latter seemed to be enjoying it as much as anybody.

The Hun first clawed desperately to disengage Ollie's strangle grip upon his throat, and failing in that, vainly transferred the same tactics to disengaging himself from the latter's feet.

But Ollie held the whip hand. Or rather, he held the bayonet hand; and with this weapon, rather more effective than a cavalryman's spur, he reached backward and downward and gave the German a none too gentle jab just beneath where he himself sat perched.

"Dunder und blitzen!" shouted the big Boche, as he began to buck viciously to dislodge Ollie from his back.

Even the Germans who were looking on laughed. But even as they did so they realized that they had let down their guard and that everyone of them within range was covered with an American rifle and was a prisoner unless he preferred sudden death. They realized that the Americans could conduct warfare and enjoy a little humorous diversion at the same time.

It was a shock to several of them, but they seemed suddenly to realize that it was good, rather than bad, fortune, and they gave themselves up entirely to the enjoyment of their comrade's misery.

"'At a boy," yelled one Company C man to Ollie, "make 'im prance."

And Ollie, enjoying himself immensely and not at all loth to give his companions all the fun they desired, suddenly loosened one foot, gave his mount a quick backward kick in the stomach, which elicited a tremendous grunt, and amid a shout of laughter which made men many yards distant turn suddenly in their fighting, the German started off at a full gallop toward his own lines.

For a few moments it looked bad for Ollie, unless he elected to make a quick drop, for none of the Americans dared shoot at the Boche for fear of hitting him. But either blinded by his rage, or bewildered by the sudden trick that fate, in the shape of a young American, had played upon him, the German suddenly turned, made two or three more grotesque bows in futile effort to throw Ollie from his back, and then came racing back toward the American lines.

"Give 'im the hook! Give 'im the hook!" came a chorus of advice from lusty members of Company C, and Ollie, interpreting the hook to mean the pointed instrument otherwise known as a bayonet, on the end of his rifle, proceeded to follow instructions. It was rather a vicious jab, which made the German suddenly draw himself in at the rear and expand in the stomach in a most ridiculous manner.

"Gott in Himmel, kamarad!" he shouted in a voice that could be heard above the thunder of cannon and the cracking of rifles.

He was purple in the face, his breath was coming in sharp snorts, and what strength he had left he was exhausting in vain efforts to swing his rifle back to knock Ollie from his

perch. In his final vicious lunge the gun slipped from his hands and went skimming through the air, narrowly missing the heads of several of the German prisoners.

"Kam—kam—," he gasped, but he hadn't breath to finish the word. He tried to buck again, his knees weakened and folded under him, and Ollie, seeing what was coming, leaned far back and gave a sudden thrust of his weight forward. The German pitched headlong and with a terrible grunt hit the ground, Ollie still astride him.

For several seconds he lay there gasping in utter helplessness, and then he rolled over, almost frothing at the mouth in his rage and humiliation. He started to shake a fist at Ollie, and a sergeant gently rested his bayonet on his chest.

"Come on, Prince," he ordered, to another gale of laughter. "You can show us some new steps on the way to the rear of the line. Barnum and Bailey want you."

The big fellow rose to his feet, and suddenly spying one of his fellow countrymen grinning, gave him a slap across the face which sent him reeling.

"Kamarad!" yelled an American youth mockingly, and the hostilities ended as swiftly as they had begun.

The sergeant ordered two men to accompany the batch of prisoners to the rear, after all of them had been disarmed, and the last seen of Ollie's bucking broncho whom the sergeant called Prince, he was leading the procession, glum but silent.

"Don't try that again," the sergeant commanded, feeling impelled to administer some rebuke to the spirited young Ollie; but even as he spoke his mouth twitched suspiciously, and he turned suddenly to say something to another group of men.

"No sergeant," answered Ollie demurely, and a dozen soldiers grinned broadly, even as they brought their rifles up and started forward into the thick of the fire again.

Why none of them had been hit while they stood forth as open targets, watching the strange performance which Ollie staged, remains one of those mysteries of Divine Providence.

They were out in the broad open land beyond the wood now, and in the distance they could see what still remained standing of Thiaucourt, the objective for which they had fought so valiantly, and for the attaining of which so many of their brave comrades already had died.

The battle took on a new fury. From every conceivable shelter machine guns popped away at the advancing Americans, who were without protection against the terrible fire. There was no chance to dig in. Their furthest thought was to turn back. Orders were to take the town. Speedy advancement, even at great cost, was the only course open to them.

Seemingly every standing bit of battered wall and terrace protected one or more of the German rapid-fire guns. Where was their artillery? Why didn't the American heavies pave the way? The answer was obvious. The infantry had far outdistanced the artillery, and the tanks had become stranded for the time being on the opposite side of the thick wood. Clearly there was nothing to it but an infantry onslaught that with many deaths as the price would carry the town by storm.

But just at that moment when many a man and officer, stifling criticism or complaint, nevertheless was thinking that too terrible a task had been placed upon them, a broad dark shadow passed between them and the sun, and more speedily than any cloud ever travelled on a clear day, flitted across that blood-soaked intervening stretch of land and toward the town.

Instinctively Tom and scores of others looked upward. As if in one voice there rose a tremendous cheer. Above them was the greatest armada of the air the world had ever seen. It was heading directly for a point above Thiaucourt, and another piece of shrewd strategy was being revealed.

As enemy anti-aircraft guns began to send their projectiles toward the fleet, it suddenly swerved upward and into a zig-zag course, but its general direction remained unaltered.

Every conceivable sort of aeroplane was in the formation. In the centre, convoyed and surrounded by swifter, lighter, more easily manipulated planes, were the great bombers, manned by crews of five, six, eight, ten and even a dozen men. These were to inflict the damage, while the others fought off all interference, acted as scouts and couriers, or in other ways guided the attack and kept the headquarters informed of the progress made.

And then occurred one of the most thrilling feats—or happy accidents—ever witnessed in the air.

Half a dozen of the one-man scout planes were scurrying along in the formation of an upright V. A dozen enemy anti-aircraft guns

were trained upon them. One sent a shot squarely into one of the two highest of the planes. It staggered for an instant, and a quick gasp went up from the American soldiers on the ground as it suddenly crumpled and began to fall.

But they had not recovered their breath when the pilot, somehow extricating himself from his seat in the falling plane, gave a wild leap. His jump was inward in the V-shaped formation. Men held their breath as he dropped straight downward. Then someone gave a shout. It was all in the fraction of a minute, but it seemed an eternity of time. So far as could be seen from the ground his leap was but a few yards to the next plane, and he was almost directly above it.

The shout that had been one merely of startled anticipation broke into tremendous applause as, for only a second, the falling man was obscured from sight by the wings of the plane under him, and then that plane quivered for a moment as with a tremendous shock, then righted itself, and the pilot, evidently divining rather than having seen what had happened, and having received the frantic signals of half a dozen pilots nearest

him, began a slow and cautious descent downward.

"He landed safely!" one man shouted frantically.

"Looks like it, but he may be unconscious and roll off any minute," another supplemented.

Men stood breathless, their hearts seeming hardly to beat, in the face of this most thrilling of all the excitements they ever had witnessed or participated in.

Four other heavier planes stood by the smaller one as it began its descent, and then, "Look! Look!" the cry went up, as a big, swift German machine hovered for a moment in the skies like a giant vulture, then swooped downward with a speed that was startling, straight for the little group that had formed to save a single American life.

Even as it did so, two large American planes detached themselves from the bombing formation, and headed for the Boche. They took him on either side just as he opened his machine guns at the smaller planes below. Throughout the war there was a chivalry among the airmen of the enemy armies that was at once an inspiration and an honor. The few violations of it gave it greater emphasis.

This pilot evidently was one of those brutes who, had he been a submarine commander, would have taken rescued men upon his deck, and then submerged, to let them drown like rats; or one, maybe, who could calmly murder children, girl children, of his own country, and mutter, "One less mouth to feed." For it is of record that some Germans did commit these and even greater atrocities throughout the war.

From a little above and on either side of him, the American planes opened a terrible fire—it was a fire of machine gun and incendiary bullets—and a dozen struck him at the same time. There was a burst of flame that swept the plane from stem to stern; its nose suddenly turned downward, and with a dive that only narrowly missed the little group on which the German had directed his attack, he fell to earth a mixed and mangled mass of man and mechanism.

As the group of little planes flew by, not more than a hundred yards above them, on the way to a safe landing place half a mile in the rear, another shout of approval went up from the men on the ground. And just over the rear of the top wing of one of the machines a grinning face appeared and a

waving arm seemed to send back a genial how-do-you-do.

It might have been the signal too, for the tremendous aerial attack that was at that moment launched upon the German gunners and infantrymen, hidden in what they believed the safe and impregnable protection of the town. Tons upon tons of highly explosive bombs were dropped, as the big fleet circled and circled over what once had been a happy and prosperous French village. A constant cloud of thick black smoke went up as incense to Mars, and every attempt of the German airmen to attack the bombers was repulsed with disaster.

Finally two swift scout planes detached themselves from the fleet, dashed for nearly a mile northward over the German army, then as suddenly turned and continuing on back beyond the machines they had helped convoy, made straight for where temporary brigade headquarters then stood.

In five minutes the orders came to the men who had witnessed these scenes.

"The enemy is retreating, leaving only a small rear guard. Advance and take the town. Remain there for further orders."

That meant that they were within sight of rest and recuperation, and every man needed it

The Khaki-Clad Warriors Surged Into the Town for Hand-to-Hand Combat.

badly. They were a tired and frazzled but determined lot. They were ravenously hungry, too, for they had not eaten for many, many hours.

Detachments of engineers were coming up directly behind them. The enemy artillery was grumbling now from an increasing distance, coming only in a scattered fire, the gunners evidently taking pot luck, without any well-defined idea of where the Americans might be.

"Advance!" The order rang out all down the line, and the men went forward on the last lap of the bitter battle for their first objective.

For half an hour there was some hard fighting, and then the Germans, what remained of them, threw up their hands as the khaki-clad warriors surged into the town for hand-to-hand combat.

It was a clean-cut victory, even though at heavy cost. Far to the north could be heard the grumbling rumble of the German guns, but even as the men listened they knew that the course was swinging eastward, ever eastward, to avoid the pitiless pincers that the strategy of Foch and Pershing were beginning to close relentlessly upon them, eastward toward the Rhine!

"Dig in!" And the most welcome news of the day, the promise of a night of needed rest, was responded to with alacrity. No chances were being taken with German trickery.

It was late afternoon and dusk was laying its cloak over the land when a brigadier arrived, briefly consulted with Captain McCallum, and then departed. In a moment he returned, however, and again spoke to the company commander. The latter turned abruptly and called the name of Tom Walton.

Wonderingly Tom approached and saluted.

"Thomas Walton," the captain announced, in what Tom thought were terribly solemn tones, "by order of the commander of this brigade I advance you to the place of sergeant."

"What—," Tom began impetuously, even for the moment forgetting discipline.

"For the capture of a German colonel, who is also a much-wanted spy," the general supplemented. "Young man, I congratulate you."

Tom came to a stiff salute; the general responded, turned abruptly and strode off.

Tom Walton was left with his captain to be assigned to his new duties.

CHAPTER IX

At Rest

IF one wants to know the real tragedy of war, he does not have to see the battle waged; he need not watch men fight and fall, need not hear their anguished moans, nor even witness their awful agony. He has only to be with a company, a battalion or a regiment when the tally of casualties is made to hear—when the weary struggle relaxes for a few hours, and there is comparative peace and quiet—the calling of the roll, with those fearful, ominous silences that follow name after name. One more closely visions then the human holocaust, and finds his mind wandering in dismal, useless, melancholy speculation. He wonders, and wondering, too vividly pictures to himself, what has happened "out there" to those brave men who are not present to respond to their names.

He knows that sometimes the explanation lies in the fact that they have become separated from their own units in the fighting, and, unable to get back, are for the time

attached to entirely different regiments. But more often the cause is all too clear; and comrades who have safely survived the terrible ordeal—who silently close up the ranks that have been left with great gaps—stand at rigid attention, their faces as fixed masks, their hearts torn by sorrow.

For friends whose real worth has been tried and proved in the acid test of bloody battle and in the face of death, have "gone west"—west, as the fine but futile sentiment of an awful loneliness likes to picture it, to the place, the far distant place, where home is; west, to the land of the setting sun, where there is no war, no death, where all is peace and quiet and happiness.

"Gone west!"—as one repeats it many times the tragedy of it drops away, and the expressive words take on the tranquility of a benediction.

As men stood ready to drop in their tracks at Thiaucourt that night, too weary to move, utterly exhausted mentally and physically by the terrific strain under which they had been for the last twenty-four hours, it was the unpleasant duty of roll-call that fell to Sergeant Tom Walton.

He would far rather have escaped it, but

discipline required that he do the task at hand without murmur or complaint, and it was in this case as it is so often in war—the sooner over, the better for all.

And so he took up the roster of the company, cast a swift glance over the men before him, and in what he tried to make a dull monotone, began.

From time to time some man suddenly would stiffen and his lips would be drawn into a hard line, as the name of his "bunkie" was called and there was no response. When Tom knew of his own knowledge that one in his own ranks had been killed or wounded, he skipped over his name with only the quickest articulation, going rapidly to the next, in order that no undue emphasis might be laid upon the casualties that had befallen Company C in the brave assault that had more than obtained them their given objective.

But there were others—a great many others—of whose absence he was not aware, and after each of these names there was that awed, painful silence in which time had to be taken to record the fact that the man was among the missing. They were intervals in which it seemed that a pin could be heard drop-

ping upon the ground. Men gave no outward sign of their grief, but each knew what all the others felt.

It was Tom himself who broke the terrible strain of the thing. He was down the alphabet as far as O.

"Jockey Ogden," he suddenly called; and as Ollie responded with a brief but energetic "Here, but without mount," a laugh ran along the line, and everyone felt better for the merest excuse for throwing off the inevitable melancholy accompanying roll-call after battle.

When it was over, Tom sought out Ollie and Harper, who by that time had returned to his company, assured that his "bang in the slats," as he expressed it, at the hands of Tom's later prisoner, was perhaps painful, but in no way a permanent or even serious injury.

In subdued tones Tom told them of the death of Major Sweeney. Would they go with him back into the night and over the ground they had traversed that day, to find the body and give it decent burial? Would they? Why, of course they would.

And through the mind of each was running the same thing. How it was Major Sweeney

himself to whom they had first gone when they had determined to enlist together—Major Sweeney, whose house near Brighton always was open to boys of that school; who was always ready with a helping hand, and who personally had coached the best football eleven that Brighton ever had put upon the gridiron.

Brave, big-hearted Major Sweeney! He had told the boys that night when they visited him at his home that within a few days he would depart for service. He had been commissioned a captain, and if they desired he would try to see to it that they were assigned to his company. And true to his word he had.

Now he lay out there on the edge of that wood where so many lives had been sacrificed, an American hero, gone to his last reward.

With the permission of the Captain the three youths armed themselves with searchlights, the sentry pass-word, spades, a hammer and saw. It was Sergeant Tom who thought of a little can of paint and a brush.

It was half an hour before they reached the wood, and an hour later before they found the body. It was a ghastly business, and

more than once they thought they were at the right spot, only to find that the search must be renewed.

When at last Tom's sense of direction brought them to the exact place, they found the body lying just as Tom had left it, the blouse still slightly open, the hair smoothed back, the right hand resting peacefully on the breast.

"Let him be buried near the spot where he fell," said Tom, in subdued tones, as, sticking his searchlight into the ground so that it would give them sufficient light, he thrust his spade into the dirt and began preparing his major's grave.

Harper and Ollie joined in the work and within another half hour they had gently placed the body in its last resting place. To Tom fell the duty of saying the brief rites; a handful of dirt was thrown in, and then, anxious to have an unhappy duty over, they completed their task as rapidly as possible.

While Ollie and Harper were doing that, Tom had sawed from a broad tree limb two fairly lengthy slats. These he nailed together in the form of a cross. And upon this cross he began to paint.

He had inscribed the lateral board with

the Major's full name, and the battalion he commanded, and then abruptly he stopped, looking far over the desolate open stretch and through the black night to where he knew Thiaucourt to be—Thiaucourt, which had been their day's objective; Thiaucourt, for the possession of which so many courageous Americans had died; Thiaucourt, where the men who had survived now lay stretched in heavy slumber; Thiaucourt, quiet and peaceful now and giving no evidence of the terrific battle in which it had been the goal.

And Tom, taking his brush in hand again, dipped it into the can and painted a brief inscription:

"At Rest."

CHAPTER X

The Spy in the Night

AS Tom and his two companions turned from their sad task with one last lingering look at the rough grave wherein lay the body of the brave man who had been their friend and advisor, as well as their superior officer, they became aware for the first time that the advance contingent of Engineers had progressed to that point on the edge of the wood, working frantically in the felling of trees and the repairing of the roads and ground over which the day's battle had raged, to make passageway for the ambulances to carry away the wounded, for the trucks bearing food and munitions, for the heavy and light artillery, the tanks and all the other vast and inevitable retinue of an army advancing in successful combat with an enemy.

From these men of the Engineer Corps the lads learned that the combined American and French attack upon the west leg of the salient, launched simultaneously with their

own assault northward, had been attended with the same success; while vague messages also repeated to them from around on the north of the huge bulge, where the French were pushing southward with an irresistible weight, indicated that swiftly and surely Allied strategy was vindicating itself in a persistent closing of a great pincers-like movement which threatened soon to entirely cut off thousands upon thousands of Germans from their main army, now in retreat. For they were in momentary danger of being trapped in a veritable pocket of annihilation by this quick closing-in process.

The great question now was how rapidly these divisions could follow in the retreat, and whether or not the Americans could, or under present plans intended, to entirely cut off their avenue of escape before they could emerge from that desperate position.

Already in the distance, over the ground which the Engineers had prepared, they could hear their own artillery rumbling forward, seeking placement for the tremendous bombardment that soon would be resumed. For the present, though, there was a comparative quiet and silence that seemed ominous. The boys expected it to be broken

at any moment by a tremendous roar of guns, with their accompanying flash of exploding shells. Their nerves were taut in subconscious anticipation of it. Yet nothing happened, and as though they, too, were under orders not to awaken the night, they picked their way cautiously back toward where their own company had halted in the attack, speaking only infrequently, and then in hushed whispers.

It was Ollie, walking between Tom and George Harper, who suddenly laid a detaining hand upon the arm of both. They looked at him questioningly in the almost unbroken gloom of the night, but they could see dimly that he was peering forward, and trained by this time to the constant vigil of warfare, they followed his gaze without a spoken word.

Both saw what Ollie had been the first to discover. A hundred yards ahead of them, against the sky line, they could make out the silhouette of a man, stooping over a form that lay prone upon the ground. As he moved about, his actions were cat-like in their quickness. Once in awhile he hesitated to peer about him, but with the background of the heavy wood behind them the lads remained unseen, while able to observe every

action in the strange, even weird performance being enacted before them.

The man was not a stretcher-bearer, neither was he a surgeon, else he would not have been alone. It was several minutes, while their vision was being focussed to the scene, before it dawned upon the lads what was taking place. It was Tom who breathed the words in a scarcely audible tone.

"A spy," he whispered.

It seemed impossible that the man out ahead could have heard, but he stopped suddenly in his hurried work, crouched further forward over the dim form on the ground, and peered all about him after the manner of some wild beast of the jungle, sensing the approach of danger. For several moments he remained in that position, while the three lads stood motionless, scarcely daring to breathe.

At the end of that time, apparently assured that he was still undiscovered, he raised himself slightly and went to his work again.

There was no doubt as to his object now. He was frantically tearing at the clothing of the man beneath him. It all became as clear as daylight now to the three boys from Brighton. There could be no further doubt

about it. The man was a German scout spy who somehow had remained in, or gotten back to, the territory taken by the Americans, and he was now fulfilling his mission by searching the dead in quest for secret orders, maps, plans and photographs, which would arm his superiors with valuable information as to the method and direction of the campaign which had been launched with such success.

"We can't advance directly without being seen," whispered Harper, drawing the others close to him so that they might hold a hasty consultation. "And we daren't shoot from here, because there's the barest chance that he may be one of our own men, although it is a hundred to one against it."

"You're right," Tom agreed. "There is but one thing to do, and that is for two of us to circle in on him from either side, while the other pushes slowly forward, giving us time to get near him without being discovered ourselves."

"Sh-h!" Ollie warned; and then, in a tone scarcely to be heard, "Look! Apparently he's found what he was after."

It was true. Even as Ollie had spoken, and the others had turned swiftly to look back again to where the treacherous enemy

was in quest of information which might greatly hinder and harass the American advance, the man cautiously raised himself and began moving forward, away from where the lads stood.

He had gone only a few feet, however, while the boys were debating as to what was the best course for them to pursue, when he again stopped, and they could just make out that he was bending over another still shadow on the ground. It was becoming ghastly. Was he in reality a spy? Or was he, after all, one of those most despicable of all human beings, a ghoul, prowling about in the night, robbing the helpless, plundering the dead?

There was but one way to find out; there was but one course open to them. They must follow out Tom's plan, without further delay, and if possible come upon the man before he scented danger or knew of their presence, capturing him in the very act of his search.

A hasty council was held. They could go back and get assistance from some of the Engineers, but this possibility held no weight with them. They would trap and take the man themselves. And with this decided

upon, it then was agreed that Tom should circle forward on the right of the stranger, while George Harper carried out a like flanking movement on the left, leaving Ollie to creep almost directly forward after he had given them sufficient time to begin closing in. All three were to arrive as a human net about the man as nearly as possible at the same time.

As Tom and Harper crept away and out of sight, Ollie remained standing where they had left him, his gaze glued to one spot, never for an instant taking his eyes from the swiftly-working man of mystery, except in those rare snatches when, to retain a clear vision, he had to look away and blink several times in quick succession when he found the constant stare dimming his sight and blurring his perspective.

Scarcely time enough had elapsed, however, for Tom and George to get well under way on their perilous mission, when the stranger turned suddenly from his work, gazed long and steadily in the direction from which Ollie knew Tom Walton would be approaching, his whole attention concentrated upon something out there which Ollie could not see.

Instinctively Ollie raised his revolver, train-

ing it upon him, ready to fire at the first indication that Tom himself was in danger of being shot or ambushed. But if the man was armed, he evidently had no taste for thus attracting general attention to himself, except in the direst emergency. From his actions it seemed equally certain that he either had seen or heard Tom approaching, or by that sixth sense of intuition, sensed his danger without knowing exactly what it was or where it lay.

Even as Ollie stood there, silently alert, covering the fellow with his gun, the latter dropped suddenly flat upon the ground and like a writhing serpent began to glide quickly forward and into the gloom ahead. As he did so his form was no longer shadowed against the sky line—in fact could be discerned only occasionally and with difficulty as he sped along with almost incredible agility.

Ollie ran forward swiftly but silently for a distance of several yards, and then dropped to the ground also, replacing his revolver in its holster so that he might the better hurry along on hands and knees in quest of the fleeing enemy.

Once or twice he stopped for the double

purpose of raising himself to make sure he was keeping in the trail of the man ahead, and to listen for indications of the approach of Tom or Harper. But while, thus far, he was keeping to the right path and making good progress, there was no sign of the presence, or even proximity, of his two pals.

Already he was approaching the spot where they first had discovered the fellow at work, and where Tom and Harper should now be closing in. But Ollie realized what handicaps they had to overcome, and also how easy it would be for either to mistake the distance to be covered before they swung inward toward their objective. Either or both might now be considerably off their given course, and without present knowledge of their exact whereabouts. Meanwhile the man they sought was steadily pushing forward and away from them, into the blackness of the night.

Much as he would have liked to wait for his two friends, Ollie decided that if the enemy was to be kept in sight and finally captured, he must continue to go forward alone. And with the thought he proceeded.

He had gone scarcely more than another thirty feet when something happened that

for the instant seemed to make his heart stand still and the blood to freeze in his veins. Momentarily he had lost sight of his quarry. In that instant while he groped about him, undecided as to his exact position and the direction he should pursue, the cold steel of a revolver barrel was thrust against his right temple, and Ollie for the first time was aware of the presence of another man, not more than two feet away from him.

It may have been that only a fraction of seconds elapsed, but to Ollie, rigid and helpless in the darkness, unable to see his opponent or make a single move, it seemed like an eternity of time, in which sudden death was inevitable, before a low voice close to his ear commanded, "Put up your hands!"

Ollie could have shouted with joy and relief. He could have embraced the speaker in a great hug. Instead, he very wisely followed a policy of "safety first." He put his hands straight into the air, as directed, and as high as he could reach, so that there might be no mistake as to his intentions. Then he whispered sharply, "Tom, it's Ollie; for the love of Mike take that gun away from my head. I don't like the feel of it at all. You might get a sudden twitching of that trigger finger."

"Well I'll be hanged," ejaculated Tom Walton, in a hushed and rather abashed tone. "It's good I didn't shoot first and speak afterward. I thought you were that Hun. Where is he."

"Not so loudly," warned Ollie. "I don't know where he is now, but I only lost sight of him a few seconds before you poked that gun to my head. He had started for home. He ought to be out there straight ahead somewhere. Wonder where George is?"

There was no time to loiter, however, if they were going to capture the man they were after, and after waiting for several seconds without hearing or seeing any sign of their friend approaching, they began cautiously and silently to push forward again.

Stretched out almost flat upon the ground, pulling themselves forward by handgrips upon the turf, only occasionally raising their heads to take a hurried but unsuccessful survey of the vicinity to locate the enemy, they finally came upon the first of the bodies over which he had been working.

They had made no mistake. The most cursory glance showed that the dead man was a captain in the United States army, and that every pocket of his uniform had been

rifled. Not only that, but the shirt beneath had been torn loose and the chest was bared, showing that the most thorough search had been made for anything of value that might have been concealed there.

The lads paused for a moment in an effort to identify the officer, but it was out of the question even to attempt to read his identification tag, and a shell fragment had so mutilated his head and face that in the darkness it was impossible for them even to guess who he was. With a suppressed sigh and a muttered threat against the man who thus had defiled the dead, they pressed onward, but without any definite idea as to the exact direction they should pursue, or how far they ought to go.

The second body was that of a first lieutenant, and here, also, the search had been complete. The boys had no doubt that each had had upon their persons explicit instructions of the whole advance, at least so far as it was purposed that their units should participate in it, but not the slightest trace of a paper, map or photograph could be found on either of them. Capture of the spy, therefore, was imperative.

But where was the enemy who had com-

mitted these thefts? A few moments before he had been plainly visible to Ollie. The latter had crouched down again to continue his own advance, and when he again looked, the man had disappeared completely. True it was a dark night; but the open space was broad, and he had been clearly silhouetted against the skyline. It was inconceivable that he could have covered a sufficient distance in the meantime to take him out of sight of the lads. They decided, therefore, to continue on.

Their disadvantage and handicap was now doubled, however, for while they had lost all track of the enemy, there was no assurance that by this time he had not discovered them. For all they knew he might be watching their every movement. It increased their caution, and when, on the still night, they heard the peculiar low whistle that probably no one else would have noticed, or taken for a human sound—the code signal of the three —Tom responded ever so lightly, and they sat down to wait until Harper should come up.

When finally he did, they held another whispered council. They agreed that while for the time being the search seemed hopeless, it ought not to be abandoned; and they

suddenly realized, too, that with an enemy concealed somewhere in the darkness, it was highly dangerous for them to attempt to proceed directly back to their own company.

In the denser darkness of a clump of bushes they halted to consider what course they should pursue. Each turned his mind to a solution of the problem. For several moments no word was spoken, and the faint rumble of distant guns worked upon their dulled senses like a soothing lullaby.

Poor, tired, overworked and overwrought youths! They had forgotten to take the inexorable laws of nature into their calculations. Even as they attempted to think, they drowsed. Heavy-lidded eyes closed, and they slept.

Now, if ever, were they completely at the mercy of a conscienceless enemy, who might creep upon them and kill before they could make an outcry or a move in their own defense.

Fate was stalking in the night.

CHAPTER XI

In the Nick of Time

HOW long they had been asleep Tom had not the faintest idea when with a sudden, startled jump, he came to a bewildered wakefulness. He felt deeply depressed, and he was distinctly aware of a feeling of alarm and a sense of impending danger. He could not account for any of the sensations. Whether someone had touched him, or he had been awakened by a sound, he did not know. Perhaps he had been dreaming. He could not tell that, either. Indeed, it was a full minute after he came back to consciousness before he recognized his surroundings and realized where he was.

Then he remembered that George and Ollie had been with him. He reached over, touched them both. Ollie groaned slightly in his troubled sleep, and Harper turned restlessly. They were safe, anyway. Tom tried to fathom the strange feeling that possessed him, but he could no more come to an explanation of what caused it than he could shake it off.

He peered into the darkness. Nothing there to cause alarm, so far as he could see, but still that disconcerting feeling of some unknown, unplaced menace. Tom decided to waken his pals. He was not afraid, in the sense of being a physical coward. It was the baffling mystery of the thing and what it might portend that was so disquieting. Perhaps it was just overwrought nerves; or maybe the strange surroundings in which he found himself when he awakened. He tapped Ollie two or three times upon the shoulder, and nudged George Harper with his foot. He disliked to deprive them of their sleep, but he felt that he must. It was not only the necessity of talking to them about this strange feeling that he could not get rid of; it was even more imperative that they return and join their company, which at any hour now might suddenly be ordered to renew the action.

But even as Ollie and George almost simultaneously grunted sleepy and impatient objections to this treatment, although at the same time opening their eyes and starting upright, Tom would have given a great deal had he left them to their sleep—and silence.

For, hardly the fraction of an instant before they had given half conscious utterance to their plaintive growls, Tom had seen, as clearly as though it had been daylight, the head, then the shoulders and half the body of a man rise suddenly from a shell hole ahead, as though directly at the sound.

Instinctively Tom knew by the way the man moved that he was not wounded. Equally obvious was it that whoever he was he was not an American, for all this territory now was held by those forces, and one had no need to hide if he was a friend.

This man was in the very act of swiftly climbing out of his hiding place when Tom spied him. At the first sound of the sleepy voices he had as suddenly dropped back and out of sight

Never for a second taking his eyes from the spot, Tom warned his two friends to silence in a way that quickly brought them to their senses, and they crept close to hear his briefly whispered statement of what he had seen.

Unquestionably it was the same man they had been seeking before they dropped off to sleep. Each had a feeling of shame that they should have weakened that way when

there was an urgent necessity before them. How long had they slept? It was a useless question. Two facts were apparent, however. It was still night, so they could not have been out of the hunt for long; and they knew the whereabouts of the enemy they sought.

One method of capture presented itself to them, and that was to creep forward in a surrounding movement and then lay there, as close to the hole as they might, without themselves being discovered, and wait for the man to make his reappearance. They were without bombs and could not attack that way. They had no rifles, either, and were entirely dependent upon their automatics. Even with these, they realized, there was danger to themselves in the positions they would be in, in any cross firing.

However, there was no other way open.

Caution, already a sort of second nature to them, was sharpened by the knowledge that their presence also was known, and by the realization, too, that this German—for there no longer was any doubt in their minds as to that—should not elude them a second time, possessing as he did information which must not fall into the hands of the Boche commanders.

As it turned out later, however, the man in hiding had good reason for electing to take his chances on escape, rather than lay there until daylight, when capture would be inevitable if he was then still alive.

While the three lads were yet some distance from the spot, proceeding in a spread-eagle movement, Harper in the centre, the fellow made a wild jump from the hole. Three shots rang out almost simultaneously. With a groan the man crumpled up on the edge of what had been his hiding place. The lads waited for a moment, to make sure it was not a ruse, then swiftly ran upon him, all three covering him with their pistols.

Considering the darkness and the quickness of the shots their markmanship had been highly creditable. One bullet had hit the German in the right hip, another in the calf of the left leg, while the third had grazed his neck. He was painfully, although not critically wounded; but he was entirely out of the fighting for the time being.

Tom stripped him of his automatic and made sure he had no other weapons, but even wounded as the fellow was he tried to put up a resistance when Ollie opened his blouse and abruptly drew forth a packet of papers.

"That means your finish, Fritz," Harper ejaculated, but the wounded man only grunted viciously.

"Search him carefully and see what else he has collected in the way of valuable souvenirs for his superiors," Tom instructed; and Ollie continued to investigate every possible hiding place in or under the German lieutenant's clothing

Evidently he had canvassed a large stretch of ground, for he was a veritable walking library of secret orders, maps and photographs taken from American officers. While Ollie was doing this, and Harper was discouraging any resistance by a threatening play of his automatic, Tom walked around to take a look into the shell hole. It had just occurred to him that the captured German might not have been working alone.

In the darkness Tom took a false step. Before he could regain his balance he went feet first into the hole and disappeared completely from sight. When he landed it was with a grunt that told that the breath had been pretty well jarred out of his body, and the Hun, even in the pain of his wounds, laughed outright.

Ollie leaned over the hole and looked in.

He expected to see Tom's face almost on a level with his. Instead, he could but dimly discern him, several feet below.

"Holy smoke!" he ejaculated, involuntarily. And then, "Oh, Tom, are you hurt?"

"No," came the response, "only jarred. But this is *some* shell hole. I'm just beginning to get my breath. Felt as if I was dropped from an aeroplane. My searchlight seems to be burned out. Drop yours down to me; I want to look around. Easy now—reach down as far as you can and then let it go. I'll try to catch it."

By mere good fortune he did. In an instant he had switched it on, and its glare was followed by a quick gasp from Tom and an involuntary expression of surprise.

"What is it?" asked Ollie, still leaning over the edge of the pit.

"What is it?" Tom repeated. "I don't know yet, but it's not a shell hole, that's one thing certain. There's a long tunnel that leads away under the ground here, and it's big enough for a man to walk through. It runs almost due north from here, so far as I can see, but the light's not strong enough to show how far it goes."

"A tunnel!" Harper repeated, at the same

time fixing the German with a severe stare. But if the prisoner understood, he gave no sign. His only expression was one of pain.

"Ollie," said Tom, who now as a sergeant could command the other two, although he had no disposition for any unkind or unjustified use of his authority, "you'd better stay there and watch Fritz, while Harper drops down here with me. We'll trail along the secret passageway that the Germans didn't build for nothing, and see just where it leads."

"I'll keep an eye on him, you can bet," Ollie answered, as Harper, by the aid of the light Tom threw upward, dropped warily into the deep entrance to the secret tunnel.

In another moment Ollie was left alone with his prisoner, and Sergeant Tom and George Harper had disappeared from sight and sound, Tom in the lead, flashing the searchlight's rays before them as they went, Harper following close behind.

They found the artificial passageway to be at no point less then five feet in height, and on the dirt surface of the flooring were imprints leading them to believe that many persons had passed back and forth through there at a comparatively recent date. Its course was almost directly northward, and

the lads could at all times see some distance ahead. Nevertheless they proceeded warily, not knowing what sort of a trap might be set for them. The air was heavy and damp, but gave them no great discomfort until they had proceeded for several hundred yards, and then they concluded that the tunnel, whatever its purpose, had but one outlet, and that was the one through which they had entered.

"Do you realize where this is leading?" Tom asked presently, as he half turned toward Harper.

"Unless my sense of direction is all off," George responded, "directly under Thiaucourt."

"Straight as an arrow," Tom added, "and we ought to be almost under the town by this time."

No longer could they hear the dull rumble of the guns, and their own voices echoed and re-echoed down the cavernous passageway, the only interruptions in an otherwise dead silence.

"Hello!" exclaimed Tom suddenly, in a note of new surprise, and an instant later the far wall flung back the word at them as though someone there were repeating it in mockery. There was something unpleasant

about the situation. It was like wandering around aimlessly in the dead of night in an abandoned house reputed to be haunted, not knowing what startling surprises awaited one at any moment.

Tom's exclamation escaped him when he noticed that the tunnel apparently came to a dead end about twenty-five feet ahead. A moment later, however, it was apparent they were approaching a right-angled turn.

Tom extinguished his own light to see if any ray came from down this new passageway, but there was nothing but pitch blackness, in which neither lad could discern the outline of the other.

Snapping it on again they proceeded slowly until Tom stood within a foot of the abrupt turn in the wall. The new tunnel ran directly to the right of the direction in which they had been approaching. With a sudden forward thrust of his head, Tom took a quick survey of what lay beyond.

He drew back with a gasp, and his free hand fell upon Harper's arm.

"Look!" was all he could say for the moment, and Harper, following Tom's bidding, drew in his breath sharply, then gave a low whistle.

They had made a discovery of tremendous moment! But had they made it in time?

"Out! Out!" Tom ordered. "We may be blown to atoms any second if we stay here."

And indeed it was true. The sharp turn in the tunnel brought them into a great cavernous chamber in which there must have been at least fifty tremendous bombs, all connected by copper wires with a heavy cable which hung suspended from the ceiling. It was obvious that during their long occupancy of the St. Mihiel salient the Germans had dug this tunnel and planted these mines, for just such a contingency as now existed—enemy occupation of Thiaucourt. And while neither lad was an engineer, both knew sufficient about bombs to realize that there were enough there to blow the whole town site off the map and annihilate every person within a radius of more than half a mile.

"Ten thousand men are quartered on the space that those bombs would blow up, and the Germans may touch them off at any time! Run! Run!" Tom ordered, and, setting the example, he bounded by Harper, the searchlight held out before him, tearing toward the mouth of the tunnel as fast as his legs would carry him.

"They're probably waiting for that German lieutenant to return," Tom managed to speculate jerkily, without in the slightest reducing speed. "It's pretty clear now that he was down here—to see that everything was all right—and put on—finishing touches."

"Yeh," agreed George, "and it just occurs to me now that he wore the insignia of the Signal Corps."

"Wanted those papers," Tom supplemented, "so as to know when the largest number of our men would be over the spot."

"Uh-huh," from Harper, but by this time neither had further breath to spare on conversation. They were forcing themselves forward with every ounce of energy they possessed.

As a gray light, barely discernible, loomed in the distance, they knew that at last they were approaching the mouth of the tunnel, and that the first streaks of dawn had appeared.

Winded as they were, neither had the strength to climb the smooth-sided hole as the German evidently had done, by the main strength of the pressure of his legs against the walls as he made his way upward.

George squared himself with widespread feet, and Tom mounted to his shoulder. Ollie, who was still guarding the prize prisoner

and awaiting their return, began popping questions, even as he helped Tom out of the hole, but the latter had no time for more than the essential facts then.

"Use your jacket as a rope and give Harper a lift out of that hole," he instructed, and while this was being done he partially regained his breath.

"Now Ollie," he continued, "go like the wind to the first officer of Engineers you can find, tell him we've discovered that everything under Thiaucourt is mined, and get back here with the necessary men as soon as you can."

He turned to Harper. "You stay here and watch this German. I've still got breath enough left to make brigade headquarters in a very few minutes. Don't let Fritz get away under any circumstances."

And at the same instant Tom and Ollie sped away in opposite directions—Tom for the highest commanding officer he could find; Ollie back over the ground they had traversed, past the grave they had dug, and into the wood in search of an officer of Engineers.

Both knew that thousands of lives were at stake. Both put forth their bravest effort. For both realized that if they succeeded at all it would only be in the nick of time.

CHAPTER XII

The Desperate Chance

As Tom, in the gray of the breaking dawn, came pounding into the lines which surrounded the thousands of sleeping soldiers, he nearly precipitated himself upon the out-thrust bayonet of a sentry whose call of halt he did not hear.

His breath coming and going in quick, sharp gasps, Tom managed to give the countersign, adding, "Sergeant Walton, Company C." The sentry lowered his rifle and Tom proceeded; but a few yards further on he was compelled to repeat the process. For once he wished that all sentries were asleep on their posts.

At brigade headquarters he encountered a man who refused to get excited, and who demanded to know in detail what it was Tom wanted before he would waken his own sergeant to see if the message could be delivered to the general.

"I tell you," Tom blurted out, in rising tones, "the life of every man here is in danger.

This place is likely to be blown off the map any minute. The whole place is mined. I've just seen the bombs—scores of them—in a big underground chamber directly under the town. I've got to speak to someone in authority."

"What's that you say," demanded a staff major, suddenly appearing on the scene. He had heard the last few words, and as he peered into the face of Sergeant Walton, who immediately came to a salute, he seemed instantly to sense the seriousness of the situation.

Briefly as possible Tom repeated his startling information. The major rattled off some orders to the sentry and a sergeant who had appeared, then left suddenly, telling Tom to wait right there.

In an incredibly short time the brigadier general, followed by most of his staff, emerged hurriedly from a dug-out.

"You are certain of this?" the general demanded sternly.

"Absolutely positive," Tom answered. "I fell into the mouth of the cave myself, in helping to capture the German who had just come out of it, and when I found that it was a long tunnel, leading directly northward

toward this spot, I led the way through it. We came upon a large underground chamber practically filled with big bombs, all connected with a cable. I should measure the distance we travelled as bringing that chamber almost beneath where we are standing now."

Had Tom himself thrown a bomb into the midst of the gathered staff members it hardly could have caused greater consternation.

The general waited for no more. He barked a dozen orders to as many different officers in rapid-fire succession.

"Come with me," he instructed Tom and those officers who had not yet been charged with special duties. He led the way quickly to a dug-out further down the line. Before they reached it bugles were sounding, men were tumbling out of their blankets, rubbing their eyes and looking about sleepily. Staff officers were shouting the orders for immediate movement. Officers and men who heard, looked around hurriedly for signs of the enemy.

In the dug-out the general ordered one of the several men sitting at telephone instruments to connect him immediately with the commanding officer of the nearest unit of Engineers.

To this officer he indicated as definitely as

he could the position of the mouth of the tunnel, and ordered him to be there as quickly as possible.

"To dig out mines," he summed up. "They're already connected up, I believe."

And seeing the first of the thousands of men under him already on the move for designated points beyond the danger zone, he took a part of his staff with him, and with Tom in the lead, set out at a vigorous double-quick for the point where George Harper still was guarding the man whose movements indirectly led to discovery of the mines.

Meanwhile Ollie had encountered even greater difficulties than Tom in his search for the commanding officer of the Engineers, for although he went directly to the wood, he found only small squads at work there, the main body having progressed in a circling movement to the northward of the town, to prepare the pathway for the day's advance.

When, after the greatest difficulty, he finally did locate the headquarters of the colonel, he arrived there just in time to see the latter and his aides departing at the head of a hundred men.

Saluting a lieutenant, Ollie started to tell him his story, but was cut short with the

information that the news already had been received and they were then on their way.

"But you arrive at a good time," the lieutenant added quickly, and addressing a superior he informed him that Ollie could take them directly to the spot.

And thus it was not without a justifiable feeling of being of some real importance that Ollie was called to the colonel's side, and walking beside that officer, to direct the way, was plied with questions as to the discovery. It was little enough that Ollie could tell, for Tom had given him but a bare outline of the danger that confronted the troops. Nevertheless the colonel thanked him warmly, not forgetting to add a word of praise for all three of the lads after he had been told how it happened that the mouth of the tunnel had been discovered.

"And you got your man after all?" he asked, when Ollie had finished, having touched but lightly upon the fact that all three had at one time dropped off to sleep.

"Yes, sir, he's wounded," the lad responded.

"Well, he'll probably wish he had been killed outright," was the colonel's cryptic comment.

As if in reply to that remark, German

guns far to the north let go a salvo of shells, several of which fell uncomfortably near. The colonel glanced in the direction from which the projectiles seemed to come, but his pace never wavered.

"Fritz seems to be out of bed, anyway," was all he said, as another shell exploded not a hundred yards to the left of them, throwing up a veritable geyser of dirt and rock and splinters of steel.

As they came over a little knoll, Ollie pointed out where the tunnel entrance was, and the colonel raised his glasses to get a better view as he walked.

Approaching, from an about equal distance beyond the spot where Harper and his prisoner sat, were the general and members of his staff. It was when both parties were within fifty feet of the entrance to the passageway that a shell exploded with such violence and in such proximity that it knocked both Harper and his prisoner on their backs. For a moment everyone thought they had been killed.

It was Ollie, who with a feeling of dread, realized the real damage that that shell might have done; and as misfortune would have it his surmise was right. It had landed directly over the tunnel, a few yards beyond

its entrance, and with such force as to cave the whole thing in!

As the general and colonel arrived almost simultaneously, the situation and its necessities became clear. It required but a moment's investigation by one of the members of the Engineers Corps to verify the fact that the passageway had been effectually blocked by a great wall of earth caved in by the shock of the exploding shell.

The general held a short consultation with the colonel of Engineers, and then called both Tom and Harper to them.

"Young men," he said, "we are going to place a great deal of reliance upon your judgment and sense of direction. A straight line drawn from the entrance of this tunnel to the spot where the shell caused a cave-in shows that you were right in saying that it ran almost directly north from where you started. You are sure it takes no turns?"

"Not until the very entrance to the bomb chamber," Tom answered quickly; and Harper corroborated him.

"Very well," the commander went on quickly. "If that is true, then we are saved some unnecessary labor. It is not likely that we could dig directly into the tunnel

from any given spot, but we will proceed directly northward to a point which you consider near to the chamber, but yet a safe distance away, then try to effect an entrance."

And with competent engineers directing a true northward course, they proceeded rapidly toward Thiaucourt.

Tom, who had been considering the distance carefully, came to a halt and saluted. "I would suggest, sir, that perhaps this is as near as is safe to begin the digging."

"Very well," the general replied, and nodded to the colonel.

A moment later fifty men with spades were lined up before their commander for instructions. He marked the spot where the tunnel might be, and then, at right angles to the direction they had walked, or almost directly east and west, he established an imaginary line.

"Dig along that, working toward this point at the centre," he ordered. "Somewhere along that line you should strike the tunnel. Proceed with care after you are six of seven feet deep."

Every man there had a fair idea of what depended upon cutting the connection to those bombs before, somewhere to the north,

a German hand reached for a switchboard and turned on the current that would cause a holocaust. Also, they knew that they were about the closest in proximity to those hidden mines, so there was no lack of incentive for all the speed that strength could muster.

Dirt flew out of that ever deepening and lengthening pit in a constant cloud, piling up a high trench work on either side. But despite the care to which they had cautioned, it was the muffled exclamation of surprise from a man suddenly dropped downward with a great accompanying scraping and crashing of earth, that heralded the discovery of the tunnel.

The general and colonel both smiled their congratulations to Tom and Harper at the accuracy of their report. At the same time spades worked with feverish haste, the man who fell into the tunnel was extricated undamaged, and the hole was rapidly widened to let two or three in at one time. Then another halt was ordered.

The colonel spoke.

"A short distance to the north of us is an underground chamber supposedly filled with highly explosive mines. They are wired and, it is believed, are directly connected up

with the German lines. Apparently the enemy has been waiting for the concentration of a large number of troops here before touching off the mines. He may decide to do so at any moment. I want volunteers to go into that chamber and sever the cable connection."

Instantly every man present stepped forward. The colonel's face glowed with pride, and the general nodded approvingly. This was the spirit which made America invincible! One looking at the general's fine countenance saw there satisfaction, absolute assurance. A nation could not fail with men like these! And they but typified the entire United States army.

The colonel rapidly picked half a dozen of the men he thought best fitted for the hazardous task at hand, and under the guidance of a clean-cut captain they dropped into the tunnel and disappeared from sight.

Agonized moments dragged by, and scarcely a word was spoken. The colonel had suggested that all hands move further away from the danger zone, but as he and the general gave no evidence of doing so themselves, none of those present, no matter how they felt about it, showed the hardihood to seem to want to

escape, when a little group of their pals probably at that very moment were struggling with the heavy cable which at any time might be charged with the death-dealing current.

Every man present held his breath when the captain suddenly dashed into sight, quickly lifted himself to the ground, and, grabbing a spade from one and a pair of rubber gloves from another, started back over the line which the tunnel followed to the bomb chamber.

"Connection's cut, but I want to see something," he told them.

As he began digging they gathered in a wide circle about him. Presently he struck a hard metallic substance. With a wave of his hand he requested them to get to a greater distance. A few more cautious jabs with the spade and he stooped over, gripping something with both hands and tugging upward with all his strength. The blood rushed to his face and the veins on his neck and forehead stood out, but after a little the thing he was pulling began to give way.

It was the severed cable. With a final jerk he pulled the loose end through the ground, and all hands could see where the cut had

been made. At last the terrible menace was over. The captain looked triumphantly at his superiors. He laid the cable on the ground.

"Don't go near it," he cautioned, "because—"

The sentence was never finished. There was a sudden sharp crackling, a gasp of exclamations from the throng, and a shower of sparks shot into the air from where the severed cable end lay upon the ground.

The Germans had turned on the current, but they had turned it on a moment too late!

The narrow margin by which a terrible tragedy had been averted was obvious to all. They stood about, awed and silent, watching the deadly current expend itself in a harmless sputter.

The general himself was a man of few words. He summoned the lads to him.

"Young men," he said, "I congratulate and thank you. You have saved an army. It will not be forgotten."

And the three youths flushed deeply as a lusty cheer went up from the men gathered about them.

CHAPTER XIII

Captured

As the three lads, hoping for a snatch of sleep before the orders came for a renewal of the battle, settled into their blankets in a dug-out which only forty-eight hours before had been occupied by Germans who held forth there in that sublime assurance born of four years of uninterrupted and practically unchallenged possession, Ollie Ogden chuckled audibly.

"What's the matter now?" demanded George Harper, none too graciously, for already he had drowsed, and the injection of humor, particularly when the cause was unknown, was not altogether pleasant.

Tom, too, looked sharply at his friend, but with other reason. For an instant he feared that the low laugh was the first hysteria which is the forerunner of one phase of shell shock—that dreaded punishment when taut nerves break, the mind snaps, and a strong man temporarily is transformed into a cowering, jabbering, pitiful hulk of his former self,

actuated by one thought, escape from the thing that caused his mental wreck.

But Tom's one quick glance was sufficient to assure him. To be sure Ollie showed the same evidences of fatigue as did the others; but all three had built up for themselves, in the sports and athletics at Brighton, constitutions which it would require far more than their experiences of the last twenty-four hours to break, harrowing as those experiences had been, and Ollie was only giving vent to amusement at a sudden thought that had flashed through his mind.

"What are you giggling at?" Harper demanded again, now only half awake.

"Remember that relay race at Brighton," Ollie answered, "when you, Tom, ran the first mile, George the second, and I was to finish with the third?"

"Aw, can't you ever forget that?" Harper interrupted, peevishly. "What's the idea of rehashing that thing again?" he added, suddenly forgetting his sleepiness.

"I'm not rehashing it," Ollie assured him, in soothing tones. "I was just thinking about it, that was all."

"Well, what's that got to do with us and this war?" George demanded, showing no

disposition to abandon the subject which always was an unpleasant one to him.

"Oh, it just occurred to me that it was somewhat of a parallel case in a way."

"What way?"

Tom also was evidencing an awakened interest, and cast another inquiring glance at Ollie.

"I'll tell you," the latter answered, at the same time giving Tom a sly wink which entirely escaped the other youth, who at that time with belligerent movements was disentangling himself from his blanket, in order to get into a sitting posture.

"Well tell us," he snapped. "You might as well get it off your mind."

"Now don't get so peeved," Ollie soothed again. "It's nothing to get so excited about."

"Oh, no, of course not," from Harper again. "Nothing to get excited about, of course. Well, are you going to tell us what you were grinning and sputtering about a moment ago?"

"Sure," Ollie answered, "if you'll just give me half a chance."

"Go ahead, I'm not interrupting you."

"You remember, Tom," again giving him the wink, "that you got so far ahead of the

others that you had the race practically won at the end of the first mile, when you touched George's hand, and he was off, to maintain that lead to the end of the second mile, when I was waiting to finish up?"

"Yes," Tom drawled, trying vainly to suppress a smile, while George squirmed uneasily and had to interrupt with, "You always have to review the whole thing, don't you?"

As George seemed about to break forth with another impatient interruption, Ollie turned to Tom again with another grimace. "It wasn't George's fault that he started across country in the wrong direction," he went on. "We all know he didn't do that on purpose. He ran like the wind, all right, but it just happened that he ran the wrong way."

There was a distinctly audible grunt of disgust from Harper.

"Yes, I remember," Tom responded in tone so obviously sympathetic as merely to aggravate the victim of the story further.

"Well, as I stood there with the relay men of the other teams," Ollie continued, "and as one after another they were touched off and were away, I kept wondering and won-

dering what in the world could have happened to Harper, and—"

"You've said all that at least a dozen times before," the latter interjected again. "What's the idea of—"

"And finally the last man was away, and still I stood there, just wondering and wondering—"

"And wondering, like a blamed idiot," Harper shot out again, in deep disgust.

Ollie went on as though there had not been an interruption to his reminiscence.

"At last I gave up in despair and trudged back to Brighton. Remember," to Tom, "the race was over before George ever stopped. Didn't even hesitate until he'd reeled off about five miles, and then it took him an hour to get back, after he'd realized he was away up the county and far off the course of the race. Well, I just recalled how I felt, when I was waiting there for something to happen, and nothing did. I was thinking that those Germans, waiting for that mine to explode and send us all into Eternity, must have felt somewhat the same way as I did."

"Huh!" George Harper grunted, in deep disgust. But Tom and Ollie burst into

laughter which was none the less uproarious if suppressed by the necessities of their present situation; and their merriment was not so much at the predicament of the Germans, if the truth be told, as in the mischievous delight they took in the increased misery with which Harper heard this oft' repeated tale of his mistake in that Brighton relay race.

"Think you're smart Alecks, both of you, don't you?" Harper growled, from the depths of his blanket, while distinct gasps of amusement continued to come from Tom and Ollie as they wrapped themselves in theirs; but a few moments later all three were sleeping as soundly and as peacefully as though nothing more serious than the story just told had disturbed the quiet routine and happiness of their lives.

And thus, too dog-tired even for dreams, as oblivious to all that was going on about them as they were themselves for the time completely forgotten by the officers and men of their own company, they slept on and on, hour after hour, unmindful and unknowing that overhead—above the dark and hidden hole in which they lay unheeded—their own advance army had moved out, and entirely

vanished in pursuit of the enemy; the whole American movement pushing forward, circling about them, leaving them alone, forgotten, abandoned.

The afternoon was well on the wane when Tom Walton, falling into a dream of that foot race which had been the subject of their conversation just before they slumbered off, awoke panting and as breathless as though in fact he had just run a mile in record-breaking time.

For a moment he looked about the dark cavern dazedly, unable to remember where he was or why he was there. Then slowly it began to dawn upon him that he had been asleep for a long time, and he rose hurriedly, throwing his blanket aside and hurrying up the short ladder to the outside world above.

What he saw almost took his breath away. The thousands of men who had been there when he and his two companions turned in for their much-needed sleep were nowhere to be seen. The land all about was a shell-torn desolation. Here and there lay corpses as grim reminders of the awful struggle which had marked the taking of what once had been the town of Thiaucourt; but so far as Tom could see there was not a sign of life any-

where—except that which was betokened in the dull booming of guns far, far to the northward.

Shouting to awaken George and Ollie, he descended part way into the dug-out.

"Up, slackers!" he called, still rubbing the sleep out of his own eyes, scarcely able as yet to fully comprehend the truth of the situation.

As the other two lads raised tousled heads inquiringly out of the warm depths of their blankets, peering at him blankly as exhausted persons do in that first instant of suddenly being brought back to wakefulness, Tom was up and out of the dug-out again, taking a second survey of the scene, reviewing the events which had preceded their turning in, casting about in his still muddled mind for some explanation of the surprising situation he found himself and his friends in.

What had happened? Why hadn't they been summoned to join their company whenever and wherever it went? A score of such questions chased each other through his mind, to be capped with the utterly disconcerting one—which way had the American army gone? Had it advanced, even beyond sight and sound, or had it—had it been compelled to retire?

For an instant Tom shivered as though he suddenly had been struck by a chilling wind, but in another he had regained his assurance and confidence, for did not the booming of the guns to the north indicate beyond question that there the battle raged anew—that in the quick advance they had been forgotten and left there to sleep away their fatigue?

Of course! And thus Tom quickly summed up the situation for his two surprised friends when they emerged from the dug-out to demand excitedly the whys and the wherefores of their sudden awakening.

"Apparently the whole army that was in this section has gone ahead for two or three miles," Tom told them briefly. "We were overlooked, which is a good warning that we should not place too great a value upon ourselves, or overestimate our own importance."

"But when," demanded George Harper, excitedly, "when did all this happen? I didn't hear anything."

"Nor I," added Ollie, not without a sense of humor, even in the most trying situation, "and yet the evidence is pretty conclusive. Apparently it did happen, and right effectively, too."

"Yes," Harper admitted slowly, and then added: "I wonder whether we'd be classed as deserters or deserted?"

"I feel like I did the day of that race, when I—" Ollie began, but the rest was lost as he dodged suddenly to escape a well-aimed kick from the irritated Harper.

It required Tom's diplomacy to restore peace and calm consideration of what they were to do in the situation confronting them.

"Only one thing to it, as I see it," said George Harper at last, "and that is to head out toward the sound of those guns and just keep on until we come up with some of our own men."

"Yes, just keep on going, that's you," Ollie answered, his mischievous nature again cropping out. "But how about your sense of direction?"

A tart reply which Harper already had phrased upon his lips remained unsaid as he abruptly pointed upward to where a big aeroplane was approaching them from out of the north. They stood silent as it came swiftly and majestically down the wind toward them.

"An American," Tom announced at last, when able to make out the markings on the

machine. "Wish he'd come down and give us our bearings."

"Seems as if he was thinking of that himself," said Ollie, as the 'plane nosed downward in its approach. "Maybe he's got some engine trouble and is going to make a landing."

"Changed his mind," Harper remarked, as the machine passed over them, took an upward tack again, then at a higher altitude began circling about them. "Looks as though he was sort of sizing us up. Tom, why not signal him?"

Acting upon the suggestion, Tom, who was the only one of the three who could talk in the arm signalling code, began to reveal their identity, while if the maneuvers of the aeroplane were significant, those in it looked on with interest.

"Americans seeking our own lines," Tom spelled out with quick upward and outward jerks and sweeps of both arms.

The three youths waited for something that might be taken as an acknowledgment or reply, but none came, or, if it did, they were too far away to see it; and a moment later the machine swept to the eastward, swooped down so close to the ground that for a time it was completely lost to sight behind

a nearby wood, then rose again and taking a wide swerve east and north finally disappeared entirely.

"He's polite, anyway, whoever he is," Ollie commented as they gave up hope of the pilot having any intention of returning to them. "He might at least have dropped us a biscuit or two."

"Which reminds me that I'm pretty hungry myself," admitted Tom Walton.

"Ravenous, better describes my awful emptiness," said Harper, "and I don't see any hope of eats around here. Let's get started."

They descended together into the dugout to roll their blankets and get their equipment, but they were not to move on just then with the freedom they had expected.

The aeroplane, camouflaged as an American machine, had done some signalling, too, but not to the boys from Brighton. Its mission in descending almost to earth behind the wood had been to make the presence of the Americans known to a small detachment of Germans which somehow had escaped detection in remaining there, and which had been waiting for darkness to fall, in order to make an effort to skirt the long American lines and join their own, further on.

And while Sergeant Tom Walton and Privates Ollie Ogden and George Harper were down in the dug-out, totally ignorant of what was going on above, half a dozen of these Germans had crept up and concealed themselves in positions most advantageous to the capture of the Americans.

The three youths had not moved fifty feet from the dug-out when without the slightest warning, or time in which to fight back, they found themselves entirely surrounded, a bayonet point jabbing the stomach and back of each of them.

There was absolutely nothing they could do but surrender, and this they did at the command of the officer in charge,—a lieutenant of cavalry, as the lads noted from his uniform and insignia.

"A fine mess we're in now," Tom ejaculated, as their guns were taken from them and they were instructed to march ahead of their captors.

"Wonder where we're bound for?" Ollie whispered in reply.

"Some place where they've got some eats, I hope," George Harper summed up, and as the first shadows of night began to fall they were herded into the Germans' hiding place, where they found a dozen more Huns.

Preparations of some sort were going forward, but to the extreme disappointment of the famished youths it was apparent that it was not for the serving of food. And it was not long before they became aware that they were in for what looked like a long and fatiguing march, although they had not eaten for many hours.

"Well," said Ollie, when that matter seemed settled beyond all hope or doubt, "we ought to be glad they didn't shoot us, anyway."

The sharp glance of a German near them was sufficient to warn them against any further conversation.

CHAPTER XIV

John Big Bear—Scout

BY short stretches the Germans and their three American prisoners had been pushing forward now for nearly two hours. The Huns were not in ignorance of their own danger of capture, and their progress was made with the utmost caution, the major number, with Tom, Ollie and George, forming a central party, ahead of, behind and on either side of which scouts reconnoitered constantly to avoid contact with American outposts.

Even in the silence and secrecy that was necessary in that cautious advance, the American youths had more than a taste of Hun treachery and brutality. Apparently the Germans knew that their prisoners were hungry, from having overheard their remarks immediately after their capture. They were made aware of their parched thirst when the lads asked for water.

And to aggravate their misery so far as possible, although the lads were too proud

to let it be seen that the acts even annoyed them, the Germans, singly and in pairs, would walk directly in front of or beside them, munching thick slices of their own brutal-looking brown, or rather black, bread, or thrust the opening of a water bottle to the lips of one of them, only to withdraw it quickly with a low laugh when the youths thus sorely tempted would try to get at least a swallow of the craved water.

"They're barbarians; they are without human instincts or feelings," Tom hissed into the ear of Ollie, who walked in the middle of the trio, "so try not to mind anything they do. Our best course is to ignore what they do in their efforts to punish us, and to avoid aggravating them any further."

At that moment Harper stumbled over a fallen tree branch and fell to the ground, splintering and crashing the dead wood.

A gutteral oath just behind him was accompanied by a sharp bayonet jab in the ribs. Harper was about to let out an involuntary cry of mingled pain and anger when Tom, who well enough knew the result would be more punishment, cautioned him, "Say nothing." The Boche, who did not understand English, peered at the sergeant

inquiringly through the darkness, but as Harper got up he did nothing worse than give him a vigorous shove forward.

They were now closely skirting a long fringe of wood that seemed to run almost directly northeast and southwest, and even the men who were stretched out ahead and on either side as "feelers" for the American forces kept well within its shadows, for the rising moon was bathing the whole countryside in its light, and objects, particularly if they were moving, could be discerned at a considerable distance. Occasionally they came upon the body of a dead soldier, the stark and staring eyes acquiring an added touch of ghastliness in the pale lunar light.

Occasionally the dull hum of an aeroplane motor would be heard in the distance, its sound rising to a roar as it approached and passed, but practically all the time it was within hearing the small band of Germans remained in hiding among the trees, and although sometimes the lads could see the machines so plainly that it seemed they might attract attention to themselves with a shout, they never were discovered by the pilots or their observers.

As this continued, and the distance cov-

ered made it seem as though they must now be paralleling, if not actually already by, the American lines, the youths became more and more depressed. The aeroplanes passed above them without knowing they were there, and thus far not a single American patrol had been encountered. The outlook was not encouraging. It began to look as though Tom Walton, George Harper and Ollie Ogden were to be ushered out of hostilities and into a German prison camp for the duration of the war.

Without a spoken word, but in glances as eloquent as any speech, the young men questioned one another as to the possibilities of escape; but though each cast about desperately in quest of what might look like the slightest promise or the smallest opportunity, none presented, and the three tramped on, striving to go along so quietly and unobtrusively as to allay all suspicion upon the part of their captors that they might even be contemplating escape. Each felt that if they could succeed in this, then the Germans might become less watchful, and perhaps, later on, when the Huns were more weary with their tramp and constant caution of attracting attention to them-

selves, they might drop behind and not be missed until they had made good their escape.

Optimism is an American characteristic, but particularly it prevails in the happy, care-free, sturdy American youth, and these three lads were of the sturdiest stock and could trace their forebears back to Revolutionary times.

It is good, too, that invariably with optimism goes courage and self-possession, or Sergeant Tom Walton might have gasped out his astonishment, or cried out in involuntary consternation, when he happened to glance upward just as a Boche in front of him struck a match to light his pipe.

There in the branches of a tree just above him, almost near enough for him to have touched it with a slight jump, a face peered down at him!

It was all in the space of a few seconds, but as the man there in the branches stared back at him, not a muscle of his countenance moving, his eyes blinking ever so slightly from the sudden flare of light from the match, Tom recognized in that swarthy personage one whom he knew—a man of iron strength, of indomitable will, of almost uncanny ability in following a trail—John Big Bear, Indian

scout for Uncle Sam, one time crack rider and dead shot with Buffalo Bill's Wild West!

Tom Walton could have shouted then and there from sheer happiness, for he recognized in John Big Bear the equal in strength, courage and swiftness of action, of any six Germans who could be picked from the Kaiser's crack Prussian Guards. But instead of shouting, or even by any other utterance or slightest sign, permitting John Big Bear's proximity to become known, Tom simply flashed back a look of understanding, to which John Big Bear vouchsafed but the slightest nod, and then the match went out, darkness again closed them in, and the Indian scout was left to the rear, still perched in the tree to which evidently he had climbed the better to observe the numerical strength of the enemy he had heard approaching.

It was perhaps a hundred yards further on, and while they were still hugging closely to the shadows of the wood, that Tom had an opportunity, a few quickly whispered words at a time, to impart a knowledge of what he had observed to Ollie. And a little later Ollie, by the same guarded process, informed George Harper.

They were now prepared for any even-

tuality, for they felt absolutely certain that John Big Bear, to whom all three had been friendly on more than one occasion, never would permit them to be taken prisoners to the German lines without some brave effort at rescue.

The question agitating the minds of the three lads was whether he would attempt this alone, or by assistance which he might procure from the nearest detachment of Americans.

Knowledge of John Big Bear's nature made it more than an even supposition that he would try it without going far afield for other assistance, and especially did the lads believe this to be true now that he was certain that they knew of his proximity; for once he launched his plan, whatever it might be, he could count upon their assistance to carry it through.

Naturally, therefore, they were keenly on edge, and at the slightest untoward sound, even so slight that the Germans themselves did not seem to notice, they were ready either for a wild dash for liberty, a running fight, or a man-to-man struggle right upon the spot.

But the lads themselves, expectant as they were, hardly were prepared for the wily Indian warfare of John Big Bear.

They were in a particularly shadowed spot when Tom thought he heard the slightest grunt, or it might have been a suppressed hiccough, from the German not two feet away from him and acting as their guard upon the right. There wasn't anything at all unusual about the sound. Tom turned a merely casual glance in that direction, and but for a slight nudge from a lithe form which had carried the German speechless and motionless to the ground, he would have come to a sudden halt.

John Big Bear was at work! And already he had disposed of one Boche—or was at that instant disposing of him—and without a single one of the other Germans realizing that anything had happened.

As Tom continued on he managed to cast one sidelong glance at the two forms locked together upon the ground. With his powerful left hand John Big Bear, trusty scout for Uncle Sam, had the German in a throat stranglehold, and before the under man could begin to writhe free, or so much as utter a groan, a knife which the Indian held in his uplifted right hand descended with tremendous force and unerring aim.

Tom knew that the Hun had died instantly

With His Powerful Left Hand John Big Bear had the German in a Throat Stranglehold.

and with only a flash of pain as the steel blade penetrated his heart!

Instinctively, rather than by any sound he heard, Tom knew that John Big Bear, as silently as the wild animals he had stalked years before in his native woods in the great northwest of the United States, was approaching again. He gave Ollie the barest nudge, and he in turn relayed the warning to Harper.

Tom felt a slight touch upon his arm. It was startling, even uncanny, to know that a man could move so silently and stealthily that he might be right beside one and his presence remain unknown until he, himself, revealed it. In the darkness the Indian pressed a finger against Tom's lips, then put the automatic pistol which had been the German's into his hand.

"Wait!" was the one word he barely breathed into Tom's ear, and the latter knew he was only to use the firearm when John Big Bear directed. And he was entirely content to trust to John Big Bear's judgment in such an emergency as this.

A moment later the German who had been stalking along beside George Harper, as the guard on the left, went the way of the Hun before him. Like a panther the Indian leapt

upon him, strangling the breath from him and swiftly bearing him to the ground at the same time, and all so silently that no one else was the wiser.

Each of the lads realized what they had not before—that it was a crafty determination to learn all that could be taught him about his own work in life, and not any lack either of strength or agility, which had caused the Indian time and again to go down to apparent defeat in wrestling matches with a powerful and practiced Japanese athlete who was a member of Company M in their same regiment.

This Jap, descendant of a race of men noted for their agility and wrestling ability, their strength and suppleness and cat-like quickness, was an acknowledged peer of that mat, even among men of his own nationality, but more than once, after he had thrown John Big Bear only with the most evident effort, the lads had seen him look at the Indian in a silent questioning way, unconsciously shaking his head ever so slightly.

The truth was, as they learned later, he had sensed that John Big Bear, did he care to, could have proved himself more than a match even for this expert wrestler, for the In-

dian was bigger, stronger, equally as quick and lithe and agile. And in the last match they had seen between the two, the Indian had rapidly bent and twisted, side-stepped and squirmed until he had just the hold upon the Jap which so many times he had studied the Jap getting upon him, and then, as though his opponent was a mere child, he had lifted him into the air and placed him, impotent and shoulders squarely down, upon the mat.

The gleam in the eyes of the Jap as he rose was not that of hatred or revenge, but rather of good sportsmanship, mingled with a look that told of a suspicion confirmed. John Big Bear had been learning every trick that the Jap knew, without once revealing any of his own; and the Jap realized that except by accident he never would throw the Indian in a serious contest again.

These were the tactics that were being brought to bear now upon the helpless, unsuspecting Germans, and one at a time they were being rendered forever hors-de-combat and relieved of their weapons which in turn were handed over to the three lads.

But if John Big Bear was strong, able and self-confident, so also was he daring, as he proved beyond all doubt that night.

Having disposed in quick succession of the three Huns who were nearest the three youths, and who had been acting as their guards, the Indian was able to whisper something into their ears which made their hearts beat a little faster in startled surprise and admiration.

"No kill 'em all," John Big Bear muttered in a low tone. "Take 'em prisoner like 'em took you. Show 'em heap big s'prise party. Show 'em American kill if want, take prisoner if want. Take 'em in, show 'em Heap Big White Chief Persh."

The lads waited in awed silence for John Big Bear to make further revelations of his plan. All this time they were walking the same measured step as though nothing at all had occurred.

"Maybe kill 'em lieutenant," the Indian continued. "Anyway get 'em uniform on me. Lead 'em to American lines. You follow. No get by you. See?"

The lads did see. John Big Bear somehow was going to get into the German lieutenant's uniform, without any of his men realizing the substitution, and lead them directly into the American lines, with their supposed prisoners bringing up the rear to prevent their escape.

"You know whistle?" John Big Bear asked, by way of indicating the signal he would give, when attired in the uniform and taking over the leadership of the German officer.

They had heard it before. It was a sound like that of some distant bird crying in a wood. No one would suspect it came from a point less than half a mile away. John Big Bear was a ventriloquist in that respect.

The march continued. Within fifteen minutes they heard the distant, dismal bird-call that signalled that now John Big Bear was leading the Germans in the guise of their lieutenant. A moment later they left the edge of the wood and struck out into the open. The lads saw one of the Germans try to approach the man he thought to be his officer. John Big Bear waved him back imperiously. The march continued.

Twenty minutes more elapsed when suddenly, in a spot which the glare of the moon made almost as light as day, and just when some of the Huns had noticed the decrease in their number, John Big Bear swung about, an automatic in either hand.

"Stick 'em up," he cried, and his manner was so menacing that the Germans, whether

they understood the order or not, after one glance behind them, which showed them their erstwhile prisoners as their actual captors, were so dumbfounded that they did not even attempt resistance.

"Take 'em guns," the Indian ordered, and Ollie Ogden carried out the instruction with alacrity.

"A regular arsenel," he commented, as he gathered in the last weapon and divided the burden with Tom and George.

John Big Bear marshaled the Germans into a double file line.

"Heap step," he shouted abruptly, and again the Germans responded as though the Indian vernacular was their method of daily intercourse.

They stepped—and at such a lively rate that in another ten minutes the startled challenge of a sentry informed them that they were within the American lines.

"Got 'em heap fool prisoners," was John Big Bear's response to the sentry's demand; but the man was a member of the same company with the Indian, knew his voice, his value and his idiosyncrasies. He peered just long enough to make certain that it was John Big Bear, with a batch of Boche pris-

oners, and then summoned the corporal of the guard.

The colonel in charge of that particular section of the front was passing at the time, heard the call and stepped over. In a very few seconds he had gathered what had taken place.

He started to commend John Big Bear.

"Ugh!" the Indian interrupted, at the same time walking away, as though the colonel was nothing more than another private in the ranks, "Not hard ketch 'em. German big wind, no fight. Heap fool."

And thus John Big Bear dismissed the incident and strode to the quiet of a well-earned rest.

CHAPTER XV

The Struggle Under the Water

As John Big Bear stalked away without even so much as saluting the commander of the regiment, the colonel stood gazing after him reflectively, the suspicion of a smile twitching at the corners of his mouth. There were several things the colonel might have done, for John Big Bear's action distinctly came within the official definition of unbecoming conduct, even insubordination.

But after all it is often not so much the act itself that counts, as the motives behind it; and whereas such conduct as the Indian's might have been deliberate disobedience in one of a different nature, the colonel, who knew men, and who particularly knew the hidden courage and devotion of John Big Bear, merely looked after the Indian as he strode away, muttering something under his breath which, as Ollie Ogden caught it, was far from suggesting the guard house or a court martial.

The boys were standing aside, waiting to learn where their own company was stationed, and the colonel had turned for a moment to speak to another officer who had come up.

"A fighter from the ground up," Ollie heard him say, undoubtedly referring to John Big Bear.

"Yes," the other man replied, "the only trouble I have is in holding him in restraint. He constantly wants to go out and clean up the whole German army himself. I must say he hasn't much respect for the Huns. I believe a dozen men like him could demoralize a whole Boche regiment."

And the lads became aware for the first time that the speaker was their own captain. They saw, too, that he carried his left arm in a sling. A pang went through them as they realized the action their own company must have been in that day while they were sleeping in the dug-out under Thiaucourt; but the thought also brought with it all that they had accomplished, and though not disposed to flatter themselves, they felt, and justifiably so, that on every occasion they had fulfilled their duty whenever and in whatever guise it presented itself.

The colonel and captain, who had been conversing in low tones, turned and approached the three lads. The captain recognized them for the first time.

"Well, well," he exclaimed. "Here you are, apparently well and sound, and we thought the three of you were gone. Have you been with another unit? Just arrived I see. What's the report, sergeant?"

Briefly, but clearly, Tom explained everything—how they had slept on while squads and companies and battalions and regiments and brigades and even the entire division moved out; how they had awakened to find themselves alone; of their capture by the twenty Germans, and later, under the leadership of John Big Bear, of their turning the tables on those of the Germans who remained living after the Indian got through his work.

Sergeant Tom Walton did not spare himself or his two pals in what looked to them like unforgivable carelessness in having slept so soundly that a whole army moved out over their heads without their having heard a sound; neither did he seek to embellish the account of their later daring accomplishment.

The colonel and captain listened in silence until the report was concluded, but the lads

found no censure awaiting them. The colonel nodded his head approvingly and again called the captain aside. They conversed for several minutes, apparently giving grave consideration to some important project, and then called the youths over.

"Our company has been pretty well shot to pieces, boys," the captain began, "but the success of this entire drive of course depends upon the manner in which every unit carries through its especial mission. And ours is a difficult one tonight. The men have been fighting all day, and those who are not dead or wounded are so utterly exhausted that they hardly can be asked or expected to do anything further tonight."

The colonel was gazing at them intently. The captain paused for a moment. The young men remained at rigid attention, waiting to learn what new service or sacrifice lay before them. Tired as they were, they knew that they had rested and slept since other members of the company had, and that they had not endured the awful conflict of the day, under which hundreds of their friends had gone down. And besides, there was something exhilarating and thrilling in receiving some commission directly from the cap-

tain, in the presence, and undoubtedly with the approval, of the commander of the regiment.

"We are not more than a quarter of a mile from a swift but narrow river," the captain continued, pointing off to the right, "but we were unable to get further before darkness. Most of the enemy are on the other side, but a strong rear guard is holding the near bank.

"To properly lay our plans for the morning it is necessary that we have some definite idea of whether the Germans have decided to make a determined stand here, or whether the main force is retreating beyond the other side of the stream, leaving only this comparatively small guard to harry and delay our advance.

"As I have said, our men are exhausted. It is necessary that we send out scouts to reconnoiter. You men already have gone through a great deal that has earned you the respect and admiration and commendation of your officers. Do you feel that you can go forward on the difficult and dangerous mission that I have outlined? I would send John Big Bear with you, but he has been through enough in the last forty-eight hours to kill an ordinary man. Are you men prepared to take up this necessary task?"

"We are," the three young soldiers answered in unison, and at the same instant from out of the darkness behind them came a deep grunt and John Big Bear stepped forward.

"Young 'em fellas go; me go, too," the Indian announced briefly

John Big Bear had been listening! The captain swung on him suddenly, his lips already framing a reprimand, when he caught the colonel's eye. The latter merely gave an almost imperceptible nod of his head, and the captain at once changed his tactics.

"John Big Bear," he announced, as though it had been he instead of the Indian who had decided the question, "you and Sergeant Walton and Harper and Ogden are assigned to report upon the approximate strength of the enemy forces on the opposite bank of the river, and also whether they are preparing to make a stand there, or are moving on."

The four men saluted and a moment later were lost in the darkness. It was not until they were crawling well within the enemy outposts that they remembered that with the exception of John Big Bear, who had equipped himself with a regulation automatic and plentiful ammunition, the others had only

what cartridges were in the revolvers they had taken from the Germans.

And it was almost at that instant that an alert sentry discovered their presence. He fired point blank from a distance of not more than fifty feet, and Ollie Ogden felt the bullet whistle by his head.

Bang! It was John Big Bear's unerring aim, and the Boche was laid low. But in that moment a dozen of the enemy suddenly rose into sight, and there was but one course open—a running fight toward the river bank, for the position of the Germans was such that retreat to the American lines was cut off, even had the four men been disposed to turn back.

Just as they reached the edge of the river a suppressed grunt from John Big Bear indicated that he had been hit, but he did not go down.

"In big water," he shouted to the others, and with a simultaneous splash they dived into the river.

All were excellent swimmers, but as they came up close together, far out in the stream, the outlook was far from encouraging. The bank from which they had jumped was lined with hostile men, and directly approaching

them was a boat containing at least half a dozen others, evidently engaged in ferrying back and forth, gradually depleting the rear guard which had been left upon the American side.

With one long breath the four men dived again, but not before Tom had noticed that John Big Bear was swimming only with his right arm, his left seemingly out of commission.

When they came to the surface again they were above the boat, which was a raft-like affair, but still at a point between it and the American side. Before their whereabouts had been discovered John Big Bear had formulated a plan and in a few swift words imparted it to his companions.

Inhaling all the air they could, in order to remain under water as long as possible, they dived for the third time. The three lads swam with all their strength down stream and ahead of the Indian, to a point just behind the boat.

There, until it seemed that their lungs would burst, they waited. Unable to stay down longer, each struck out again for the top. They lifted their heads into the air not ten feet below the boat, and just at an instant

when, if the situation had not been so serious, they could have laughed outright.

John Big Bear, giant of a man that he was, with the strength of a Sansom despite his wounded left arm, had come up unsuspected on the upper side of the boat, and, despite the weight of the men in it, had with one deft and tremendous upward push turned it over. Or, to be exact, with the men all lined up on the opposite side, waiting to take pot shots at the swimmers when they came up where they thought they must, he was just in the act of turning it over, with their unconscious assistance, when the lads came up for air.

The Germans had neither time nor thought for shooting then. It all had happened so suddenly, as most things did that were engineered by John Big Bear, that they were seized with consternation as they hurtled headlong into the river.

Each of the lads had his gun ready, butt-end outward, for the struggle that must ensue. John Big Bear, working with one arm and shoulder, as he had to, was having all he could do to right the boat again.

There were shouts from the American side of the bank which indicated that another raft loaded with men was trying to put out.

A Boche came up beside Tom Walton, gave one wild stare at him and dived again, just as Tom's revolver butt hit the water with a resounding splash. Ollie at that moment was struggling in the grasp of a gigantic Hun. With three quick strokes Tom was beside them. He managed to hit the enemy a terrific blow over the head, which released Ollie, but a moment later it was George Harper who had to come to Tom's rescue as a German who had dived under him dragged him gasping and breathless, below the surface.

Some of the Germans had fled down stream as fast as their swimming abilities could carry them, but enough had stayed to make it a terrible struggle, with all the odds upon the enemy side.

Firing had ceased on the bank when it was seen that Americans and Germans were all mixed up together in the water, but no sooner had John Big Bear righted and crawled into the boat than bullets began to whiz around his head.

This angered John Big Bear, and it's bad business to get an Indian mad. He is likely to do some damage. John Big Bear was no exception to his race.

Lying flat in the boat, he leveled his revolver over its side. Pop! And a Boche who twice had nearly drowned Ollie Ogden went down to a watery grave. The sight so disconcerted the other Huns who had seen it that they immediately dived. John Big Bear's gun continued to speak as one by one they came to the surface again. Instantly all dived. The lads saw only two finally reappear. Whether the others had been killed or drowned, or had made their escape in the darkness, they never knew.

Nor did they much care. It had been the most exhausting experience they ever had been through, and as they climbed into the boat which John Big Bear managed to maneuver to them, and each laying to the oars struck out with all their strength for a point of safety down stream, they were thankful enough to have escaped alive.

A bullet had smashed John Big Bear's shoulder, and all were half frozen from the icy water and chilling winds. But they had learned that for which they had been sent. The rear guard left on the American side of the stream was rapidly being ferried to the opposite side, and no shots worth speaking of had come at them from there. Undoubt-

edly the Germans were continuing a hasty retreat under cover of the night.

And with all the strength they had remaining in them, after half an hour's rowing had brought them to a place of safe landing, the lads ran back into the mainland, to report to their commander and get hot coffee and into dry clothes.

CHAPTER XVI

The Death Dungeon

EVEN as the lads had started from the river's edge inland to where their own lines stretched away to seemingly endless distances south and east, the moon which had been such a handicap to them in their sortie against the Germans hid its light behind gathering clouds, and that which had developed into a steady drizzle before they reached their company's quarters was now a veritable downpour as they turned in for the night.

Truly, they were in France! As Ollie remarked between vigorous tugs at a mud-caked and water-soaked shoe that was reluctant to leave an aching foot, it was unbelievable that it could rain anywhere else with such persistency and in such quantity.

"I don't know what country is on the opposite side of the earth from France," he said, with a vehemence engendered by the weather, his shoes and the experiences he

had endured, "but I'll wager it's a mighty fertile land whatever and wherever it is."

"Hope it grows men who know how to keep quiet when others want to sleep," a deep bass voice grumbled out of the darkness of a corner which the boys up to that moment had thought unoccupied.

"Buck Granger!" George Harper almost shouted. "Of all things unexpected! When did you get back?"

"Caught up with you again about noon," Buck answered drowsily. "They thought they had me for keeps, I guess, but I'm limping along all right. I'm back to hand Fritz something as good as he gave me."

The meeting took on the characteristics of a family reunion, for really the lads had not realized what a warm spot Buck occupied in their hearts until he had fallen, as they thought, mortally wounded, the day before. And so, despite his sleepy protests, they kept up a running fire of questions and conversation for the next ten minutes.

"Well," said Buck at last, as though in retaliation, "now that you've about pumped me dry, suppose I turn the tables and ask what you fellows have been doing out so late as this?"

"Fair enough," answered Tom laughingly. But before they were half through telling him of their experiences of that evening, and all they had been through since he had last seen them, Buck was sitting up wide awake and plying them with interested queries upon this and that phase of their harrowing escapes and thrilling captures and adventures.

"Say!" that energetic youth finally ejaculated. "I'd have given a whole lot to have been along."

"Wish you had been," said Ollie, with deep sincerity. "There were times when we certainly needed you."

"It means certain and early promotion for all of you, of course," Buck went on, "and promotion is certainly worth striving for; but it isn't that so much as just having been through such things."

The other three lads nodded in silent assent.

"Just imagine, Tom," Buck Granger went on, with increasing enthusiasm, and turning toward the newly-made sergeant, "just imagine the yarn that will make for a little snoozer you're joggin' on your knee when you're a grandfather, eh?"

"Say, look here," Tom interjected, in a startled tone.

"Oh, that's all right," Buck went on. "You expect to be a grandfather some day, don't you, if you get through this all right?"

"Your mind certainly can cover great distances in a short stretch of time," Tom objected again.

"Yes, but that story will make any kid proud of his grandpap," Buck continued, while George and Ollie chuckled at Tom's evident discomfort. "Why, that would make any youngster wish he had been living in the days of the taming of the Boche, just to have knocked off a few of them himself. Yes-sirree!"

And when Ollie knew by the sound and regular breathing on either side of him that both Tom and George were sound asleep, and he himself was about dozing off, he heard Buck mutter, in a self-accusing tone, "By gosh, I'm an unlucky guy; nothing like that ever happens to me."

Then Ollie slept. It could not have been long thereafter that Buck Granger also drifted off into the land of sleep, to have this rest interrupted with vivid dreams of personal participation in all the incidents that his three friends had so modestly related to him.

What wakened Buck he could not tell, but

he knew it was hours later and that the rain was still falling and that it was yet dark, although probably beyond the hour when, had it been clear, dawn would have been breaking. But it was not the mystery of what had wakened him that bothered Buck so much as it was that terrible feeling that possessed him—that unexplainable, indefinable feeling that we all have at times, when for some unknown reason we feel certain that something is wrong and we know not what, or why we feel it so keenly.

The four youths were billeted in the small section that remained standing of what once had been a cow-shed. Yes, here once had been a fertile farm, the home and the support of a thrifty Frenchman and his family. And now it was a vast shambles and ruin, with only a part of the cow-shed remaining as tragic testimony to its earlier estate. Not very luxurious quarters, you may think! But real luxury, after all, when compared to water-logged trenches and rain-soaked, rat-ridden dug-outs.

As Buck first came out of his sound sleep he was conscious only of the ceaseless, pitiless hammering of the rain upon the rusted tin roof of the shed within which he lay—con-

scious only of that and of the indefinable feeling, which he could not overcome, that something was wrong.

And there is nothing that so unpleasantly grips the mind and the imagination, and causes the heart occasionally to miss a beat, as that tense waiting, waiting, waiting which accompanies a premonition of impending evil or danger—born of no one knows what—which comes to one with sudden awakening in pitch darkness and amid strange surroundings.

So it was that even as Buck Granger lay there, fully aware now of where he was, and listening to the even breathing of his three friends who were stretched out not more than ten feet away from him, something happened which seemed almost to make the blood freeze in his veins.

It was a moan! Weak, subdued, but distinctly audible, it came from directly beneath him, as though out of the very ground upon which he lay.

Buck Granger was no coward, but there are some things which, calmly accepted if not easily accounted for in the assurance and self-possession which one feels in daylight, seem to verge upon the supernatural in the darkness and mystery of night.

The hand which Buck Granger passed swiftly across his now wide staring eyes was as cold as ice. For a moment he lay there as though hypnotized. And then the moan was repeated, this time so subdued as to be scarcely audible, but all the more uncanny for that very fact. With a quick movement that brought him to his hands and knees, Buck literally dived across the black space to where the other three men lay, landing directly beside Tom Walton.

"Tom!" he whispered shrilly into the latter's ear. "Tom! Wake up! It's Buck Granger! There's something queer going on around this shack!"

Tom, who had been partially aroused by the first mention of his name, came upright into a sitting posture as Granger spoke jerkily of the mystery at hand; and he sat up with such suddenness and force that his head, striking Buck directly under the chin, nearly dislocated the latter's neck and as narrowly escaped cracking Tom's skull.

"What is it? What's the matter?" the young sergeant demanded, also in a hoarse whisper, as they both rubbed their respective injuries.

"Listen!" Buck responded; but there was

no necessity, for just at that instant the moan was repeated for the third time, now as clear and distinct as the first time Buck had heard it.

"Great Scott, that's wierd," Tom exclaimed, almost involuntarily. "What is it? Who is it? Where does it come from?"

"I don't know who or what it is," Buck whispered back, "but it seemed to come right up out of the ground where I was asleep, and you're right, it's wierd enough."

"When did you hear it first?" Tom asked in a low tone, at the same time cocking his ear in the darkness for a repetition of the strange sound.

"Just a moment ago—heard it twice," answered Buck. "Let's waken the others and make a light and see what we can find."

Tom reached into his pocket and drew forth an electric searchlight which he immediately switched on. Their first act was to squint around in the glare of the light into every crook and cranny of the little cowshed, but there was nothing unusual to be found, nor was there any further sound.

"I've always heard that ghosts fade into thin air and cease all sound when a light appears," said Tom, trying to speak lightly.

"There's no such thing as a ghost, as you

and I both know," Buck responded, resenting anything that might tend to make him look foolish. "That groan came from a man, and whoever he is or wherever he is the fellow isn't far away from where we are right now."

"What's the matter with you two, anyway," demanded Ollie Ogden, suddenly sitting up and rubbing his eyes, and at the same time so distrubing Harper that he, too, awakened.

"Wait a minute or two and you'll know as much as we do," Tom replied.

But they did not have to wait that long. The words had hardly died on Tom's lips when something most resembling the sighing of wind through the bare branches of trees, but which all four knew to be a human sound, reached their ears. And just as Buck Granger had said, it seemed to come from directly out the ground, at the spot where he had been sleeping.

Tom took the pocket searchlight over to that part of the shed and began an examination. He laid his ear to the damp earth, but could hear nothing. Then playing the light over the ground, he got down upon his hands and knees for a closer examination. Standing around him and gazing over his shoulder,

the other three carefully followed his every move.

He was moving around almost in a circle, when accidentally, in a quick turn, he kicked a section of the shed wall heavily with the heel of his boot. He drew up suddenly, and the other lads crowded closer to him.

"Didn't that seem to you to have a peculiar sound?" he asked.

"It certainly did to me," George Harper replied.

"Like tapping a rotten watermelon," said Buck Granger, in language more descriptive than elegant.

"Sounded hollow, anyway," put in Ollie Ogden.

"That's just what I thought," said Tom, and to verify their verdict he tapped the partition again. It gave off the same empty sort of sound.

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed George Harper, leaning over Tom's shoulder, and examining the woodwork above the sergeant's head. "I guess this explains it. Looks like some sort of a secret door."

He had been tracing the outline of a scarcely perceptible crack which ran from the floor to a height of about three feet, then across

for two more feet, where it joined another vertical one which paralleled the first. Also he had found what anyone might have taken for a knot-hole at first glance, but which closer examination showed to have been made, apparently for the purpose of pulling the thing open.

"Try it again," Tom suggested, as George, with one finger crooked into the aperture, gave it a tug without any seeming result. "Try it again; I thought it moved a little."

With considerable effort Harper managed to twist two fingers of his right hand into the hole, and again gave a sudden jerk; but the only result was a slight vibration, while George vigorously rubbed his two pained digits.

"Wait a minute," Ollie suggested, and going across the shed he picked up a piece of iron shaped at the end like a stove poker. "Try this," he suggested.

"Let somebody else do it," said Harper. "My hand feels as though it was broken."

Tom took the iron, fixed the end into the hole and gave a mighty yank. As the secret door gave way under his weight, Tom suddenly and unceremoniously and without advance preparation took a seat on the floor at the far side of the shed.

At any other time his fall might have caused some merriment, but no one paid attention to it now. They were too busy examining a little apparatus in the closet-like aperture in the wall of the shed, which now stood exposed to full view. The mechanism resembled, in fact was almost a replica, of the dial on the front of a combination safe. The only difference was that this disc was marked only with an S at the top, an O at the bottom, and with a line running part way around it, near the outer edge, with an arrow at the bottom end, showing that the small lever over the dial was always moved from the top downward to the right, and then upward on the other side.

"S and O," Tom read off, gazing at the queer thing as he joined the others. "And it points to S now. Why, that seems to be clear. It means 'shut' and 'open.'"

"If it's connected up with any signalling apparatus a complete revolution of that lever also might sound an S.O.S.," suggested Buck Granger.

"Or it might mean 'slip out,' while the slippin's good," put in Ollie.

"Oh, it might mean any one of a thousand things, such as 'stop orating,'" George Har-

per spoke up, impatiently, "but I'm inclined to believe Tom's right. Let's try it, anyway."

Tom was just reaching for the small lever when another suppressed moan, unquestionably from directly beneath their feet, arrested his hand.

"There's someone down there under the ground," said Tom, in an awed whisper. "I believe there's some connection between that person and this thing here. I'm going to try it anyway. Suppose you fellows stand back there against the opposite wall, in case anything happens to me when I turn this lever. And Ollie, you hold the light so that it will be directly on the dial."

Not knowing what to expect, the three youths stood with their backs against the opposite wall, staring at Tom's hand as the fingers closed on the lever and he began turning it toward the mark O, in the direction the arrow indicated.

Slowly he pushed it round until the point was directly over the O. Tom stepped over to where the others were, and he was just in time. There was a sucking sound, such as is made by drawing one's boot out of oozy mud, and then *the ground where Buck Granger had slept began to move upward!*

The lads stood huddled together. The ground, which proved to be but a very thin layer, gave way, and a trap door lifted itself slowly into the air.

Tom was the first to move. He stepped over and peered down into the hole.

"Great guns!" he gasped, in a quivering voice.

The others were at his side in an instant. The sight was a staggering shock to all.

There, on the bottom of a black cavern that apparently extended under the whole flooring of the cow-shed, lay two bodies. Both were in French uniforms. Obviously one man was dead. The other moved slightly and gave another low moan that showed he was alive, although not conscious. Three huge rats scampered away in fright as the light was thrown upon them.

"Ollie," said Tom, again taking the leadership, "you get a surgeon as quickly as you can. We've got to get that fellow out, and save his life if possible."

Without a word Ollie was gone on the errand directed, while Tom, holding to the hands of George Harper and Buck Granger, lowered himself into the subterranean prison, the floor of which was not more than five feet below that of the shed.

Tom turned the living man over so as to see his face. It was drawn in lines of suffering and fixed in an expression of absolute terror. The whole body was emaciated almost beyond belief.

"Poor fellow," murmured Tom, as he placed one arm under the shoulders of the soggy and mildewed uniform. "Left here to go stark mad and starve to death. Probably heard the death rattle of his companion here as the rats already were gnawing at him. Ugh!"

The man weighed no more than an average boy of fifteen or sixteen years. Tom raised the body carefully, lifted it to the height of the shed floor, and into the hands of the two youths waiting there. Tom himself was just climbing out of the pit when Ollie and a surgeon entered.

"What have we got here?" the latter asked, as with businesslike precision he strode to the still form on the floor, the boys making way for him.

In a few brief words Tom explained—told how Buck Granger first had been awakened, then how all of them had heard the moans, and of the discovery of the secret switch, and then of the cavern and the bodies within.

As Tom spoke the surgeon cast a queer look at him, but an instant later he was working over the unconscious Frenchman, a hand on his pulse, his ear to his heart.

"Weak," he announced at last, "mighty weak. If he survives it will be because you men reached him not a moment too soon. But at that he may be a hopeless lunatic. We can't tell about that yet—especially when a man has gone through what this one evidently has."

The surgeon again looked down at his patient. "Why," he ejaculated suddenly, "he wears a major's uniform—infantry, too."

It was true. The ghastly ruin of a man that lay before them once had been a battalion commander in the French army.

"Discovered at last," the surgeon murmured, more to himself than the others.

"What?" demanded Tom, quickly.

"The terrible torture prison that we all have heard about, but never knew how to locate."

The surgeon paused for an instant as the unconscious man made a feeble movement.

"Unquestionably," he continued, "this is the Hun chamber of horrors known throughout the Allied armies—the Death Dungeon."

CHAPTER XVII

John Big Bear Avenges

IT was breaking daylight, the rain had ceased and the sky was clearing when stretcher-bearers arrived to remove the unfortunate Frenchman from the squalid shed which had been the roof of his dungeon prison.

A steady and terrific pounding of the big guns in the rear had begun. And as though the first shot had been the signal for general activity, the vast area occupied by the American troops became suddenly peopled with thousands of khaki-clad men. They swarmed here, there and everywhere, apparently springing to life and action from nowhere.

The individuals formed into small groups, and these in turn rapidly mingled with and became parts of larger units; and thus uninterruptedly the process continued until, in the briefest conceivable time and with remarkable system and precision, and even before the sun was well above the horizon,

an army had been reassembled and was ready to follow the creeping barrage which would be laid down by hidden artillery, as soon as its present firing had mowed away wire entanglements and other obstructions which aerial observers already had reported the Germans as having left behind them as they began another day's retreat.

The direction of the firing indicated that it was along a line stretching far to the northward, and as time wore on it became apparent that the extreme upper end was swinging eastward in a movement of which the section of line where Company C remained was the pivotal point. Nor was the object of this strategy, and the part to be played in it by those surrounding the pivot, long in doubt.

For four miles almost due east of Company C, the American lines stretched out unbrokenly where they had smashed back the southern leg of the St. Mihiel salient. Not only had this line remained invincible to each successive effort of the Huns in counter attack, but it had slowly but steadily advanced northward, in absolute keeping with the prearranged schedule by which every unit was to go forward.

This line, and the troops around the pivot

on which the turn was being made, were to hold firm for a time, and then advance but slowly, if at all, until it had been fully determined whether the enveloping movement being swiftly carried out by the left wing was a success or failure.

If it accomplished its aim, and closed in, or pocketed, the retreating Germans before they could make their escape, then but two courses would remain open to them—suicidal battle, which must mean ultimate annihilation, or surrender.

The big question of the day was whether the already routed Germans could get through the neck of the bottle-shaped line in which their pursuers now were closing in upon them, before even that escape was cut off.

But if that section of the line in which the lads were stationed was not to advance at once, at least no man there was inactive, for there was more than enough to keep everyone busy during every moment of the time that they were waiting for the word that would send them again into the life and death struggle in which the contending armies were engaged.

Red Cross units which had not been able to keep pace with the rapid advance now

were coming up and making ready to go forward with the first of the doughboys to carry on the offensive.

Trucks in apparently never-ending line were replenishing the company kitchens, bringing up more men and munitions; wireless tractors were pushing to the very front of the lines to maintain complete communication between the foremost and division and brigade headquarters when once the drive in that sector should begin.

Tractors, and mules only a little less powerful, were bringing forward some of the heavy guns, new field hospitals were being set up, and in every department of the great game of war big preparations were under way.

"Doesn't look as though it was intended we should loaf around here very long," said George Harper to Phil Godwin, another member of Company C, who came hurrying up at that moment.

"That looks like a pretty safe prediction," the other man responded, "but where on earth have you been. I've been hunting you and Ollie Ogden for half an hour. Major Barton, down at the hospital, sent me after you two and Tom Walton. Just found Tom, but do you know where Ogden is?"

"Right there," answered Harper, for Ollie had at that moment arrived from another direction and was standing almost directly behind the man who bore the message.

"Major Barton wants to see us at the hospital," Harper explained. "I wonder what he wants us for."

"Why," Ollie answered quickly, "Major Barton was the surgeon who treated that Frenchman we found under the cow-shed. Do you suppose it is in reference to that?"

"It must be," said George, "although at the time I did not connect the two things. Do you know where Tom is? The summons also included him."

"Yes, just down the line here," Ollie replied, at the same time leading the way toward where Major Barton awaited them.

"Maybe that poor Frenchman has died," was Harper's comment, after they had told Tom their own speculations as to the call for their presence at the hospital.

"I sincerely hope not," said Tom, "although it wouldn't be much of a surprise if he failed to survive such barbarous punishment as that. He was more dead than alive when we reached him. By the way, where is Buck Granger?"

"Captured," answered Ollie Ogden, without an instant's hesitation.

"What's that?" the other two demanded of him in unison, coming to an abrupt halt and turning to face the bearer of this rather startling news. "What did you say?" Harper asked again, unable to believe that he had heard right.

"Captured," Ollie repeated briefly.

"Well holy cats, when and where?" Tom exploded. "I didn't know there were any Germans in this immediate vicinity, except those who are our prisoners."

"I don't believe there are," answered Ollie, making desperate efforts to repress a grin.

"Look here," George Harper exclaimed impatiently, at the same time grasping Ollie by the shoulder, "quitcherkiddinow, wadayamean, Buck Granger's captured?' '

"You talk like a machine gun," Ollie responded, sparring for time. "I meant exactly what I said—Buck was captured."

"When?" Tom Walton demanded.

"About an hour ago."

"Where?"

"Oh, only a short distance from where I was."

"Who captured him?"

Ollie made ready for a quick dive away from the immediate reach of his two companions.

"One of the field hospital outfit," he answered quickly, at the same time jumping to safer quarters. "Said he had no business out for another day or two, with his wound."

Whatever pleasant hostilities Tom and George may have contemplated were abandoned with their arrival at that moment at the place to which Major Barton had summoned them. They entered in silence, and the major met them at the door.

"I'm glad you came when you did," he greeted them, "but weren't there four of you? Where is the other man?"

"Cap—," Ollie began, but Tom, with a quick frown and a surreptitious kick which made Ollie wince, squelched him before the word was finished.

"Buck Granger is his name, sir," Tom answered. "But he was suffering from a slight wound himself, and he got out earlier than was intended. They sent him back to the hospital this morning, to remain for another day or two."

"I see," Major Barton replied, with the flicker of a smile playing about the corners of

his mouth for an instant. "Wouldn't stay put, eh?"

"I guess that was about it," Tom answered.

"But they captured him," added the irrepressible Ollie, and the surgeon joined in the laugh.

"Well," he said, "I suppose you can imagine why I sent for you boys. It's in reference to that Frenchman you rescued from the death dungeon. I believe he will pull through all right, but he is in for a long siege, and what he needs most, of course, is nourishment and rest. So, when he responded to treatment a while ago and regained consciousness I determined to send him back to the base hospital, where he will get just the sort of treatment he requires. I think he can stand the trip without any bad results.

"But when he realized where he was he regarded it as nothing less than a miracle, for he had given up all hope of escape from his underground prison. He insisted upon knowing how his rescue had been accomplished, and as he showed wonderful vitality and recuperative powers, we told him. When we informed him we were about to send him back to a base hospital he insisted that he

see you boys before he went. So, if you are ready, we will go in."

As they passed down the double row of cots in the improvised hospital—that mercy station where men receive first aid before, if their wounds are sufficiently serious, being sent back to the base hospital, where better facilities and attention are possible, they saw many men whom they knew personally, others whom they recognized by sight. Brave fellows, at least temporarily incapacitated for further battle, they lay there weak and helpless, smiling wanly and wistfully as the lads, with a nod and a kindly, cheering word for each, passed by.

When they came to the cot of the Frenchman they recognized an improvement already. Hair and beard that had been matted and tangled had been combed out. He had been bathed and clothed in fresh linen, and the mental relief that came with finding himself safe was reflected in his countenance. But he was pitifully weak, as the lads realized when he feebly grasped the hand of each.

As the French soldier began to speak, Tom saw John Big Bear standing just a few feet away from them, evidently waiting for them, obviously listening to all that was said. He

had just received a second treatment of his slight wound in the shoulder.

"I never expected to get out of that place alive," the Frenchman gasped weakly. "They tell me I must not talk much, but I wanted to thank you before they took me away from here. If it had not been for you lads I probably would be dead now. The other man who was in there with me died twenty-four hours before I lost consciousness, and I could not have held out much longer."

The man spoke almost perfect English. And this was explained in his next remark.

"I lived for ten years in your country," he said, "and now I owe my life to the intelligence and courage of four of its bravest sons."

He moved restlessly, and the lads saw for the first time that the four fingers and thumb of his left hand were gone. He saw them looking at the disfigured member.

"Not by a bullet or shell," he said, by way of explanation, "but cut off with a hatchet, one at a time over a period of ten days, by the same Germans who finally thrust me into that hole to die. They were enraged because I refused to give them military information. They cut off the little finger, and gave me forty-eight hours in which to think it over.

They repeated the process every two days until only the hand remained. Why they did not start in on the other I do not know."

The grunt of rage which came from directly behind the lads caused all to turn, and the Frenchman to look inquiringly. John Big Bear had heard enough. He was striding away toward the door. And while his only language at the time was a series of deep grunts, could they have been interpreted they would have been to the effect that while his ancestors might have scalped a few whites, they never cut men's fingers off to force a secret, and it was a pity, after all, that the Indian nation had not survived and prospered, to scalp every German who had the slighest warlike disposition.

"Our friend," Tom explained to the mystified Frenchman. "And a brave and loyal fellow he is, too, although he seems a trifle queer to strangers."

The Frenchman nodded, and, seeing the attendants approaching with a stretcher, to convey him to the waiting ambulance, he asked them to remain until he was actually started away.

The lads walked beside the emaciated officer, and as they emerged through the wide

doorway they saw John Big Bear standing outside, apparently in deep and unpleasant meditation.

Looking beyond him Tom saw a group approaching—half a dozen German prisoners being taken to the rear under two American soldiers as guards. A moment later and he realized the first prisoner to be one of those whom they and John Big Bear had brought in. His exclamation attracted the Indian's attention, and also that of the man on the stretcher.

John Big Bear looked at them without the slightest change in expression, but the effect upon the man who had been rescued from the dungeon was instant and startling.

With a cry that was almost a shriek he pointed at the big German in the lead. The recognition was apparently mutual, for the latter's face went as white as chalk, his step wavered, and even though it was apparent he was making a tremendous effort to maintain his self-possession, his hands shook.

"The beast!" the Frenchman shouted, his weak voice breaking into an hysterical sob. "It was he—he—who cut off my fingers. It was he who threw me into that pit to die."

In that tense instant a shot rang out. The

big German crumpled and went down in a heap without so much as a sound. If anyone there knew from whence that shot had come, he made no mention of it, and there was no investigation.

The others gathered about the German who had gone down, but he had died instantly—shot directly through the heart. John Big Bear, with just a perceptible grunt, turned and walked away.

Tom Walton, glancing after him, saw the Indian push something down into his pocket; that was all. The tortured Frenchman had been avenged.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Death of Snooper Jones

ALTHOUGH what meagre reports there were to be had indicated that the long swing of the left wing of the American army was progressing favorably, the orders for the big push by the men in the pivotal sector did not come that day. The constant roar of the big guns, with occasionally a big German shell dropping near enough to do considerable damage, kept them on the tiptoe of expectancy and ready for any emergency; but aside from the rather routine work that falls to men of an army temporarily at a standstill, and which they were allowed to do in relays, the men got a longer and more beneficial rest than they had had since the drive was inaugurated on September 12th.

On the following morning, however, came orders which cast doubt upon the entire success of the project of bottling the Germans up in a pocket of the salient. Had that been accomplished, the artillery would have

smashed away until the ambushed enemy either had surrendered or been annihilated. Instead, came orders to forge ahead with all speed, and gain contact at the earliest possible moment.

"We're going to chase them clear to the Rhine this time," Tom heard one officer say to another, and indeed the preparations that had been made, and the manner in which the orders to move were carried into effect, made that seem possible, even if not the actual intention of the present assault.

Indeed, the Americans pressing in from the west, and the French bearing down from the north, with other Americans bringing an even stronger upward pressure from the south, had so thoroughly routed the Hun armies that they were fleeing precipitately, abandoning guns and munitions as they went, but making every effort to so destroy these, as well as all roads, bridges, etc., that the Allies might not make use of any of them.

And with the enemy thus in costly and undignified flight, with never a chance to stop even for a few hours to reorganize, and with all the boasted discipline and morale of the German forces destroyed beyond all hope or possibility of re-establishment, the

Allied commanders were well content for the time being to conserve their own men and supplies by vigorously prodding the Huns in their flight whenever and wherever they seemed to lag.

The orders to go forward came at about 8 o'clock on the second morning. They went in heavy marching order and with full rounds of rations. It looked, indeed, as if they were bound upon a long journey this time, and as it turned out they were.

As they swung off in a cloud of dust—for the ground had dried out pretty well during the preceding day—they were preceded overhead by flocks of scouting aeroplanes. With them along the roads and through the fields went trucks loaded with munitions and food, while behind these came the light artillery, and, far, far back, the heavies.

Two hours march brought them to a point where the entire army came to a halt while the scouts and pioneer infantry went ahead to reconnoitre and destroy the first of the wire entanglements thrown behind them by the fleeing Germans.

The quick pop of guns and the rattle of rapid fire as these men approached a thick wood which lay just ahead was ample proof

that the artillery had not dislodged all of the Huns, and that snipers and machine gunners were hidden there as a rear guard to delay the American advance long enough to permit the main German army to get away.

The American fire from the north had died down to little more than an occasional bombardment, and necessarily directed at a long angle to prevent shelling the other troops which were now making the advance.

Company C was one of the five units deployed to attack and take the wood. As the men started forward the officers in command of the various companies again gave a warning which the men had heard repeatedly before going into an attack.

"Do not touch a dead German for any purpose whatever."

It was not that the situation was any different here from what it had been in other battles in other places, but the order was issued as a matter of course and to keep it fresh in the minds of the advancing men.

At no time during the war were the Allied armies even accused of looting the dead; but where great masses of men are drawn together in thousands there are bound to be

exceptions to any rule—men so selfish and unprincipled that they would place the gratification of personal desire above the sacred repute of their army and their country if they thought they could do so and escape detection.

And the Germans, knowing this, and probably expecting far more of it from the extent to which it was done without hindrance or scruple by their own officers as well as men, with that cupidity born of vicious minds had time after time used this very weakness of men as a means to their sure and sudden destruction.

In the dead of night they would send back electricians over the field on which a battle had raged, and, picking out German corpses, these workers would put cheap but costly-looking rings and other jewelry upon the dead men, and then attach these to wires, through which ran deadly electric currents as soon as the work was completed and the trap set.

Any man of the opposing army advancing on the following day who so far succumbed to the temptation thus deliberately set, as to attempt to take off any of this seemingly valuable jewelry, instantly got a death-

dealing shock which invariably threw him into the air with sparks shooting from his body, after which he fell to the ground a seared and scorched and eternally disgraced corpse himself.

"They haven't had time to doctor up any of those bodies along this route," Ollie Ogden heard a man just ahead of him mutter, and looking up he recognized "Snooper" Jones, so nicknamed because he was constantly meddling in somebody else's business and never attending to his own. He was the most despised man in the whole regiment for his lack of pride and patriotism, and knowing the feeling and lack of respect and esteem in which he was held, he did not seem in the least to care.

Nobody knew just where "Snooper" Jones' home was, if he had any, but it was known that he had been a draft dodger and that he had been picked up by Government agents along with half a dozen others of that cowardly and disreputable character in a raid conducted one cold night upon the loungers in a railroad station in one of the large eastern cities.

In other words, "Snooper" Jones, to use a common expression, had been a bum. He

was a drone bee in the industrial hive of organized society. He was a waster of his own time and energy and a burden upon others. He consumed without producing. He took, and gave nothing back.

"I'd like to know," an exhausted and exasperated lieutenant once had flung at "Snooper" Jones, "what your aim is in life."

And "Snooper," consciously or unconsciously more truthful than he ever had been known to be before, answered, "I haven't any."

The army, that great purifier and energizer of most men of "Snooper" Jones' character, had failed to make any visible change in him.

"Like the lily," his top sergeant had said of him, "he toils not, neither does he spin. But unlike the lily, he is not good to look upon."

All of this was passing through Ollie Ogden's mind as they tramped along and from time to time he could hear "Snooper" Jones grumbling to the men on either side of him, neither of whom paid the slightest attention to him, except occasionally to cast upon him a withering glance of scorn which was at the same time a storm warning which kept him silent for a time.

Ollie's contemplations were abruptly cut short as they seemed suddenly to jump right into the very maelstrom of battle.

In quick succession, as though by a time clock process, the Germans from their rearmost heavy guns had planted half a dozen highly destructive shells right into the ranks of the advancing Americans, and simultaneously, as they skirted what they thought an uninhabited wood, machine gun nests had opened up a devastating fire upon them.

It was not until later that they realized that their quick advance had brought them directly upon the rear guard of the German army which, encumbered as it was by the huge paraphernalia which it carried with it in its flight, could not move nearly so rapidly as did the pursuers.

The fighting was as bitter as any during the war, and over ground that already was littered with the bodies of dead Huns—victims of terrific shrapnel fire poured into their lines as they fled.

Every inch of ground was bitterly contested up to the point where the licked Germans saw it was useless to hold out further. To silence this fire it was necessary for the Americans to pick off the snipers and stalk and

capture or demolish the machine gun nests. Bullets fell about them like hail.

Into the very thick of this Tom Walton and George Harper saw a man rush forth, rapidly set up a tripod on top of which was a black box affair, and start turning a crank.

He was a moving picture operator, officially designated with the American Expeditionary Forces and especially assigned with that brigade—one of scores of intrepid, courageous fellows who under circumstances of the greatest stress seemed to show the greatest calm. These were the men who were preserving to future generations the living, moving history of America's participation in the World War, and a dozen times a day when the panorama of battle was swiftly moving they fearlessly and without the slightest evidence of outward concern, risked their lives in the performance of their duty.

Buck Granger once had remarked that this particular operator must bear a charmed life. Truly it had seemed so, for time and again the lads had seen him stand forth, motionless except for the regular rhythm of his right hand which turned the crank of the camera—a challenge and a target for every German sniper and machine gunner within range.

And yet he had escaped, up to the present, without a scratch.

But here, for the time, the fire was more concentrated than either Tom Walton or George Harper ever had seen it before. An officer shouted to the movie operator to drop out of sight. But even if the latter heard, the warning came too late. A shower of bullets shattered and knocked over the camera, and in the same instant the operator himself pitched forward on his face. From where Tom lay he could see that the man did not move a muscle, after the first convulsion which followed his fall. He had been killed instantly.

Officers and men of the ranks were being picked off mercilessly as they crept forward to get within reach of the hidden machine guns. It was at this juncture that another branch of the service took a hand. It all showed, too, that the commanding officers were every instant in close touch with every changing development of the attack.

The order came for the Americans to fall back several hundred yards. To the mystified Germans it was a maneuvre not then to be explained. It was inconceivable that the Americans should be retreating, and yet

that seemed to be exactly what was taking place. But the Germans in the wood had their visions obscured from their own approaching doom.

Up from out of the west, and straight for a point directly over the natural fort of the enemy, swooped a dozen heavy bombing planes. It is doubtful if any German in that wood ever knew what happened to him. Simultaneously every plane let go its full cargo of destruction, and these highly explosive bombs, descending straight as arrows, struck the ground at almost the same time, and with such a detonation as to shake the surrounding country as though by an earthquake. The entire wood was demolished. Trees were lifted from the ground and split to splinters. Nothing lived there after that work of death had been carried out. Devastating ruin had been wrought suddenly and completely. The ground was torn to great depths and a shower of wood and rock and other debris was shot fifty or more feet into the air.

It was after they had passed through this monumental wreckage, and were crawling forward upon the opposite side, that Ollie Ogden, intent upon getting around a clump of bushes so that he could get a view of a sniper

he knew to be hidden there, found himself but a few yards away from "Snooper" Jones.

The latter was edging forward in a declivity of ground, and for an instant Ollie marveled at the courage and persistence of the man—but only for an instant. For looking slightly ahead, he saw that "Snooper," thinking himself hidden from human sight, was crawling toward the body of a German, his intention obvious in his every movement.

Ollie could not shout a warning without attracting a concentration of bullets upon his own position. Unseen by "Snooper" Jones, all he could do was lie silent and watch. "Snooper" was now within a couple of feet of the body which lay with right hand outstretched, a ring upon the third finger.

With ghoulish greed Jones covered the short intervening distance and with a quick snatch reached out for the ring.

Even the German sniper hidden in the bushes gave a startled utterance of astonishment at the suddenness of what happened.

The body of "Snooper" Jones, shooting forth sharp streaks of bluish flame, was lifted two feet into the air, and then dropped back a scorched and withered and motionless mass

"Snooper" Jones had paid the death penalty!

CHAPTER XIX

The Scope of it All

AND now, as the days passed and the fighting settled down to more of a desultory routine than it had been in the earlier stages of the terrific struggle, these men who had earned a new glory for the United States and American arms began to get a new perspective on what it was they had accomplished in squeezing that big bulge out of the enemy line. For the first time since the drive began they had opportunity to take account of stock, as it were, and to realize what it was they had done in administering ignominious defeat to these supposedly crack troops of the Kaiser—troops that had rested and trained over a long period while holding the St. Mihiel salient as a constant menace over all that section of France immediately beyond.

What was it that these Americans had accomplished? They had set the tide of war against the Hun hordes—started them upon the retreat which ended in defeat and disaster,

and thus began the ending of the worst war in all human history.

Within the second day of the big drive the Americans had taken Thiaucourt, Thillet, Hattonville, Herbeville, St. Benoit, Jaulny, Vieville and Xammes, and Boche prisoners to the number of more than 15,000. As a matter of fact the German character is such that he is only courageous when victorious, only daring when fighting in excessively superior numbers, and optimistic only so long as fortune smiles upon his side. Let the conditions be reversed and his courage turns to cowardice, his daring becomes cringing fear, and surrender and safety become his dominant thoughts.

Thus it was as the Americans pushed on, overcoming all obstacles, fighting and conquering, even against great odds and under the most severe handicaps. The Germans, once realizing the invincibility and the determination of the armies in pursuit of them, lost their vaunted courage, ignored orders, cried "Kamarad! Kamarad!" in treacherous beseeching for mercy, throwing themselves upon the very principle of humanity which they had defied and attempted to destroy.

Nor had the boys themselves come through

the terrible battle and their own harrowing experiences entirely unscathed. Tom, who had escaped wounds, was now bewailing the misfortune which had led him, crawling, one day during the attack, through a clump of weeds which had badly poisoned the left hand and arm. He had had two days under a surgeon's treatment, and though on the way to speedy recovery, still had the damaged member swathed in drug-soaked bandages.

George Harper could tell what it felt like when a bullet cut its way across his scalp, just a fraction of an inch above the point where it would have meant his instant death. As Ollie put it, George had established a new style of coiffure for the army, parting his hair across, in the direction from ear to ear.

Ollie's own optimism, however, was often strained as his face twitched with the pain from a badly sprained ankle which compelled him still to hobble around with a cane. And Ollie could trace his own pain and discomfort directly to a German, although the latter paid the worst penalty in the scrimmage, which involved the Hun, Ollie and a Frenchman who had come upon the scene in time to participate in the conclusion of the hostilities.

It was one of those personal encounters which were so frequent in the fighting in the woods. Ollie had come face to face with a Boche nearly twice his size in a thick clump of trees whose heavy foliage made the place almost as dark as night in mid-day. The German was out of ammunition, but evidently having heard or seen the young American approaching, he had the butt of his rifle posed for a crashing blow over Ollie's scalp when that wide-awake youth realized his position and the necessity for instant action. It was too late to retreat, and he had lost his own gun ten minutes before and also was without bullets for his revolver.

He dodged, just as the gun descended, and as the heavy butt of the rifle came down upon his shoulders he grabbed the German by the legs and upset him. But Ollie also went down at the same time, and under the weight of the massive Boche. He wriggled free and had partially arisen when the German again threw his more than two hundred pounds of averdupois upon him. The force of the impact was such that something had to give way, and it was the ankle upon which most of the load came. In the excitement of the moment Ollie did not even feel a twinge of

pain, for it was a life and death struggle, with all the odds in favor of the German. It was just at that moment that the Frenchman put in his appearance. With a glitter in his eyes that seemed to reflect all the stored-up wrath and hatred of France against the German race, the poilu raised his gun, butt-end first, just as the German had done when Ollie came upon him. But this time it was the German who was the intended victim, and he could not escape while the youthful American retained his iron grasp around his knees.

It was all over in an instant, but when Ollie tried to rise his left leg caved under him. The Frenchman gave him a helping hand, but even when he was upon his feet he could not walk, could not even touch his left foot to the ground, while the jar and shock of trying to hop sent excruciating pains shooting all the way to his hip.

So the Frenchman, who was not very tall, but extremely broad of shoulder—a man who had been a hard-working, peaceful farmer until the barbarous German armed mobs had come coursing over neutral Belgium and into France—had taken him upon his back and had carried him for more than half a mile to the nearest first-aid station.

Thus it was that all three lads, although able to be moving around, were on the sick list and were called upon, if at all, only for the lightest duties. And so it was, also, that when the great summing up came—the casting of the total, so to speak—when every agency that had been brought to bear or had participated in the campaign was taken into the accounting, the three lads were brought into that semi-clerical, altogether pleasant and highly informative task.

It afforded them an entirely new impression of the magnitude of a single big battle in war, when they learned something of what had taken place in that now historic St. Mihiel Drive, of which they were themselves no small or unimportant part.

All had seen the vast telephone system in operation, a system which was changed and extended and contracted almost hourly as the tide of battle swung back and forth and the advance steadily continued. Nevertheless it was in the nature of a revelation to know that no less than ten thousand men had been engaged in operating it. And supplementing all this, a silent corps of three thousand carrier pigeons had flown back and forth, faithful and often martyred servants in

the great cause of humanity, fulfilling their duty unquestioningly, unerringly with that rare sense of direction which man has never fathomed.

More than six thousand telephone instruments were connected up to five thousand miles of wire in the system already mentioned, and together with the pigeon service supplementing it, it afforded a service rivalling that of many fair-sized cities.

Ollie Ogden, going through the figures set forth in one set of reports, uttered an involuntary ejaculation as his total correctly showed that during the drive four thousand, eight hundred motor trucks had carried food, men and munitions into the lines. And in addition to this, miles of American railroad, both standard and narrow guage, carrying American-made equipment, assisted in the transportation of men and supplies throughout the period of advancing conquest.

Of the more than one hundred thousand detailed maps, together with some forty thousand photographs, completely showing every foot of the ground over which the battle was to be fought, the youths knew before the drive was fully launched. But significant as these facts were of the scope and thorough-

ness with which the battle was to be carried out, they were not prepared for the proofs of American efficiency which their present duties brought before them.

Apparently no contingency was overlooked, and it was this care in preparation which figured so largely in the sustained drive which utterly routed the theretofore self-confident Germans.

The hospital facilities that were provided for the care of the sick and wounded included thirty-five complete hospital trains, with no less than sixteen thousand beds in the advanced, or almost front line, sector, and fifty-five thousand such additional beds behind the lines. That not more than ten per cent of them ever had to be used was a matter of natural gratification and another proof of the expert strategy which directed every mile of the advance. Nevertheless the preparations had been made, in the event that they were needed, and this sort of leadership served but to strengthen the confidence and determination of the American fighting forces.

During every daylight hour that the battles raged, the records as well as the personal knowledge of the boys showed, the skies constantly had been swept by squadrons and

fleets of aeroplanes, preventing aerial observations by the enemy, attacking the moving infantry, artillery and supply trains of the retreating Germans, and at the same time most effectively directing the fire of the American artillery, with the most devastating effects upon the demoralized Hun forces.

In all a total of one hundred and fifty-two square miles of French territory, and seventy-two villages, which the Germans had held for four years, were captured outright in the drive, and for the reduction of the German defenses which they had thought impregnable, and for the creeping barrage which almost invariably preceded the doughboys in their attacks, more than a million and a half shells were fired by the American artillery, making the territory being traversed by the fleeing Germans a great charnel country of death and destruction.

With a remarkably small casualty list to themselves, everything considered, the American forces took no less than sixteen thousand prisoners, which was only a small proportion of those annihilated in the merciless advance, and to this conquest of territory and men they added the taking of one hundred and eleven guns, many of them of large calibre and great

distance range, and great stores of munitions and supplies which the Boches had not time even to destroy in their headlong flight back toward the Rhine.

But most significant of all, as Tom with pride of his country pointed out, as the boys in the approach of evening got together to compare notes, was the confidence displayed in advance that all of this would take place, exactly as it had been planned and according to scheduled time and program.

And that it all had been expected, counted upon, taken for granted as practically assured before the first gun was fired, was evidenced by the fact that every arrangement was made for the use that was made of more than ten thousand feet of moving picture film, actually portraying the Germans in their disorganization which speedily grew to a rout and presaged their early and certain defeat in a war which they had precipitated upon the whole world and practically all civilization.

CHAPTER XX

Well-earned Rewards

"HAVE you heard the news?"

Buck Granger came bursting into a little group of men which included Sergeant Tom Walton, George Harper and two or three others.

News! It is the great thing for which an army looks and watches and waits. News of a campaign to be launched, of an attack to be expected, of the men who have been in hospital or are missing, of the things that are going on back home where every soldier himself wants to be. News! The word always makes men forget their aches, their pains, their gossip or chatter to hear it.

"What news?" demanded George Harper. "We haven't heard it. What is it."

"The Germans are asking for an armistice. Austria has already followed the example of the other German allies, set first by Bulgaria, and now Germany practically admits herself defeated and is suing for time in which to determine terms of peace."

"What!" a couple of men ejaculated in unison. "Where did you hear that?"

"From a Frenchman and an American half a mile below, who have just returned from Paris," Granger explained, as breathlessly excited as were his listeners. "It's gospel, too, for I heard the men repeat it to a captain and a major."

"Why, that means the ending of the war, with complete victory for the Allies," put in Sergeant Tom.

"Hooray!" shouted another, unable longer to control his enthusiasm, "and that means that we'll soon be starting home to the good old U. S. A."

Like wildfire the news spread throughout the camp, and apparently it soon was confirmed from more authoritative quarters, for the officers themselves seemed lifted to a new sphere of happiness, and made no effort to keep down the jubilation which now ran high among the men.

Ollie Ogden, coming past one of the branch telephone posts, responded to a mysterious beckoning of a friend in the Signal Corps.

"Heard it?" that young man asked, in lowered tones.

"No; what?" was Ollie's reply and query.

He was drawn aside, and for two or three moments he lent willing ear to the whispered words of the other man. His face was a marvel in changing expressions, but as he turned a questioning look upon the Signal Corps man, the latter concluded with, "It's absolutely true; I got the message myself. The date's set for November 11th, and this, if you'll recall, is mighty near that date."

Ollie waited for no more, but hurried along to where he knew he would find Tom and Harper. He was surprised to find that apparently everyone else knew of the reported request of the Germans for an armistice, but it was left to him to be the bearer of the information that the request had been agreed to, under certain stipulations, and that, tentatively at least, November 11th was the day that had been agreed upon for the suspension of hostilities.

It was in the very height of the further excitement caused by this confirmatory news, that a messenger arrived to say that the three lads, together with one or two others, were wanted at brigade headquarters.

"What for?" George Harper asked.

"I have my own suspicions it's not for anything unpleasant," the messenger replied

with a knowing grin, "but at the same time it's not for me to say or begin predicting, and if I were you I'd hustle right along without asking any more questions."

The advice was good in that the lads could do naught else, and there evidently was nothing to be gained by interrogating the other fellow further. So in ten minutes they were at brigade headquarters, while several companies stood at attention and a stern looking French major-general stepped forth before the men who had been summoned from several different units.

The purpose almost instantly was made clear, and Tom Walton, at one end of the line, was the first to receive a French decoration. Although all of the men had heard much about such proceedings, they were not entirely prepared for what happened immediately after the general, without a word or other sign, had pinned the emblem upon Tom Walton's blouse.

The soldier of France grasped the American sergeant by the shoulders, firmly planted a kiss upon his right cheek, then turned him slightly and for the edification of all the onlookers, repeated the process upon the left.

And thus, to the suppressed amusement of

the scores of men who witnessed the ceremony, and to the consternation and confusion of the young men who were the principals in it, the award of honors and the accompanying osculatory salutations continued, until every one of those who had been summoned there had received the badge of his valor, together with the embrace and kisses upon the cheek which are a part of the French custom of such recognition of deeds of sacrifice and heroism.

As speedily as they could, when the ceremony was over, Tom, George and Ollie headed back to where the men of Company C were gathered; but not yet was the work of the day concluded.

Their captain had been seeking them, and to him they were bound at once to report.

"I congratulate you," he said, as the youths appeared before him, "for not only have you today received the Distinguished Service Cross from the French Government, and well earned them, too, but the higher command of your own army has also recognized the value of your services, in promotions which the colonel has just certified to me.

"Sergeant Thomas Walton you are hence-

forth a second lieutenant in the United States army, and I herewith hand you your commission duly signed."

Before Tom even could give utterance to the surprise and gratification which for the moment overwhelmed him, the captain had turned to the other two boys.

"We may be upon the verge of peace," he said, "and yet again one never can tell what the next hour will bring forth in war. But whatever occurs, whether hostilities be continued or suspended, both of you are advanced to positions of sergëant—and in announcing these advancements or promotions I am proud to say that they were hard won and are well deserved, and that I wish you three young men the greatest of happiness and the very best of luck."

The world war was about at an end. The three boys from Brighton had been tried and found capable in every task that had been placed before them.